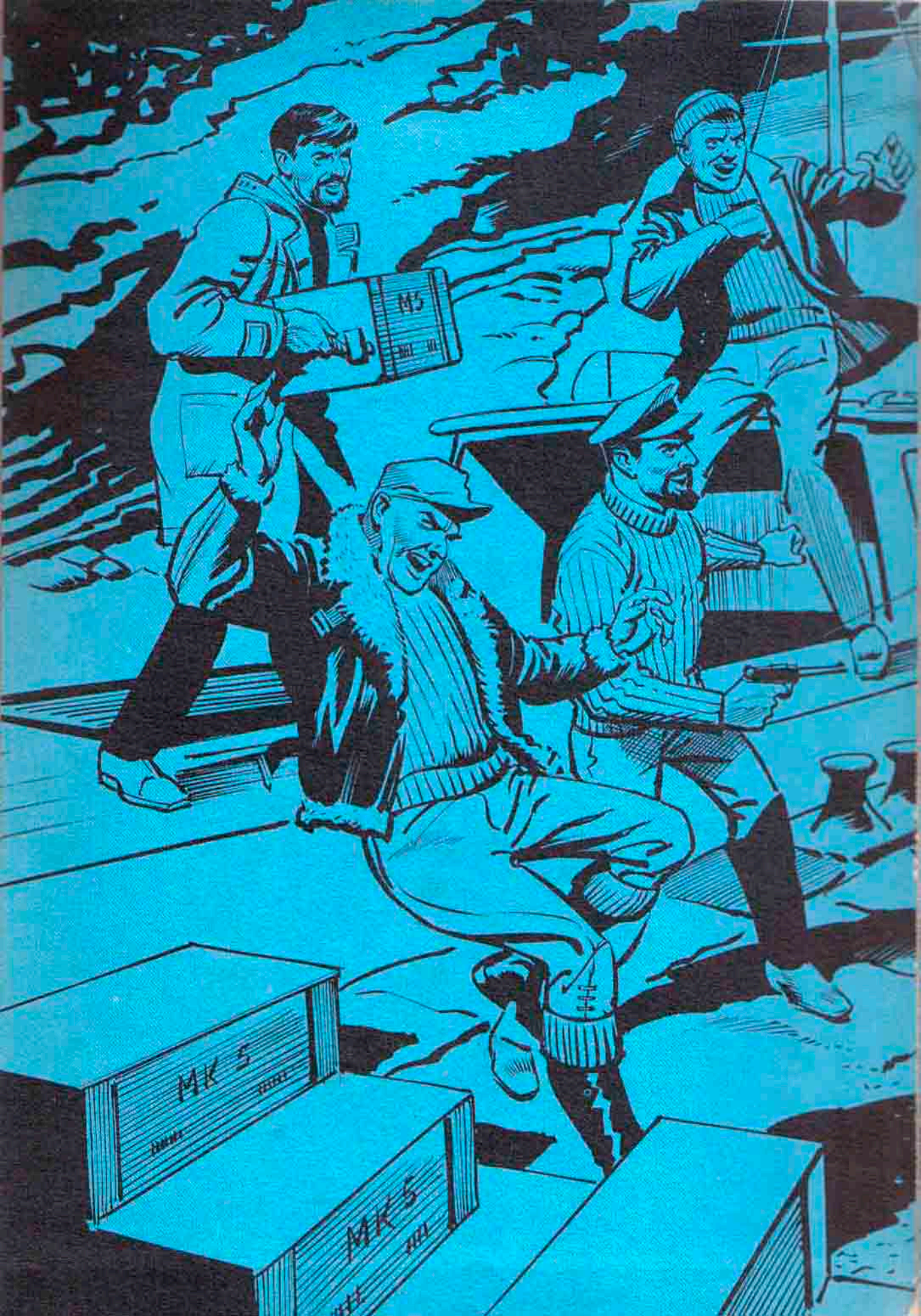
ADAM ADAMANT

Based on the popular BBC television programme ADAM ADAMANT LIVES!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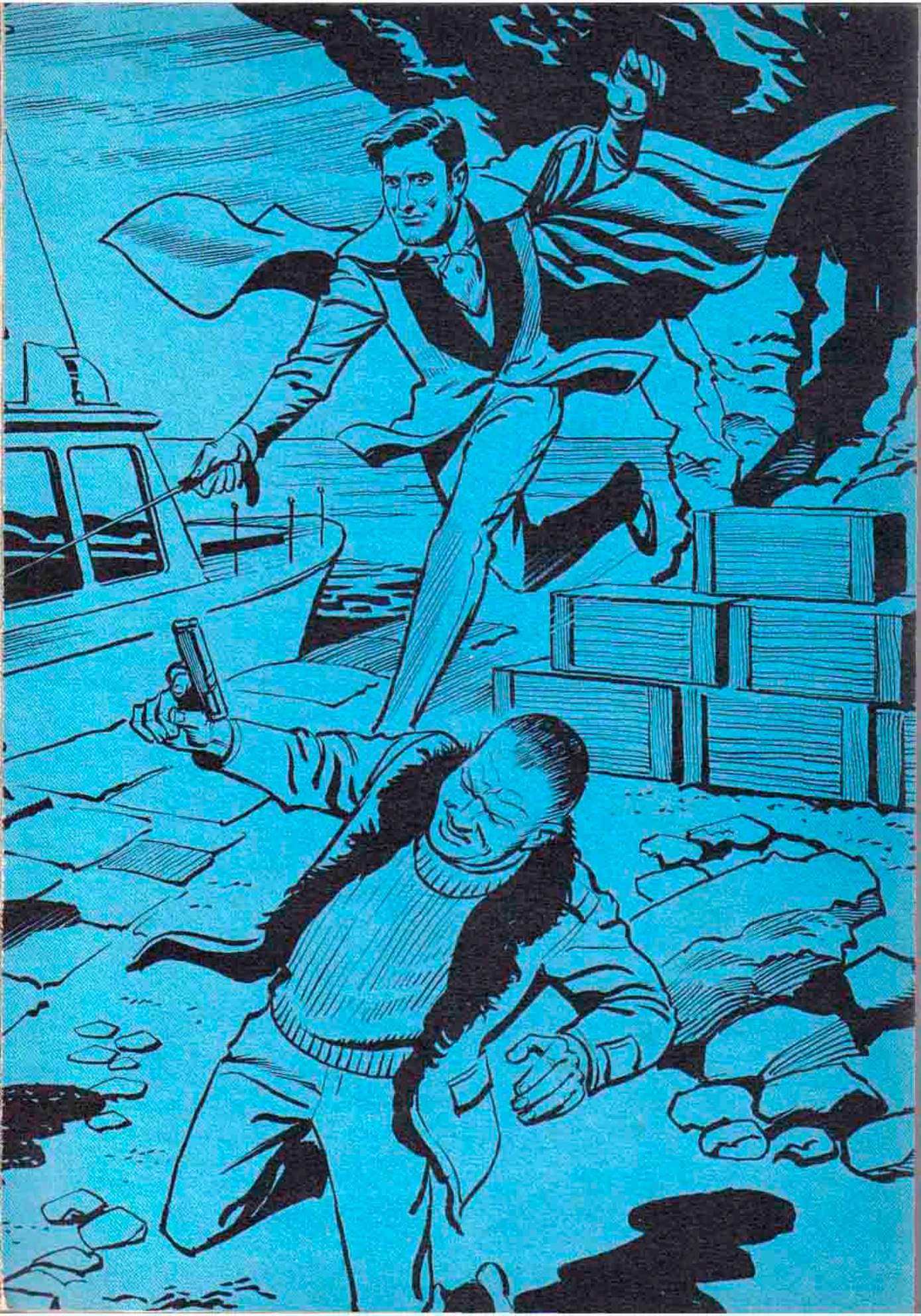

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ADAM ADAMANT

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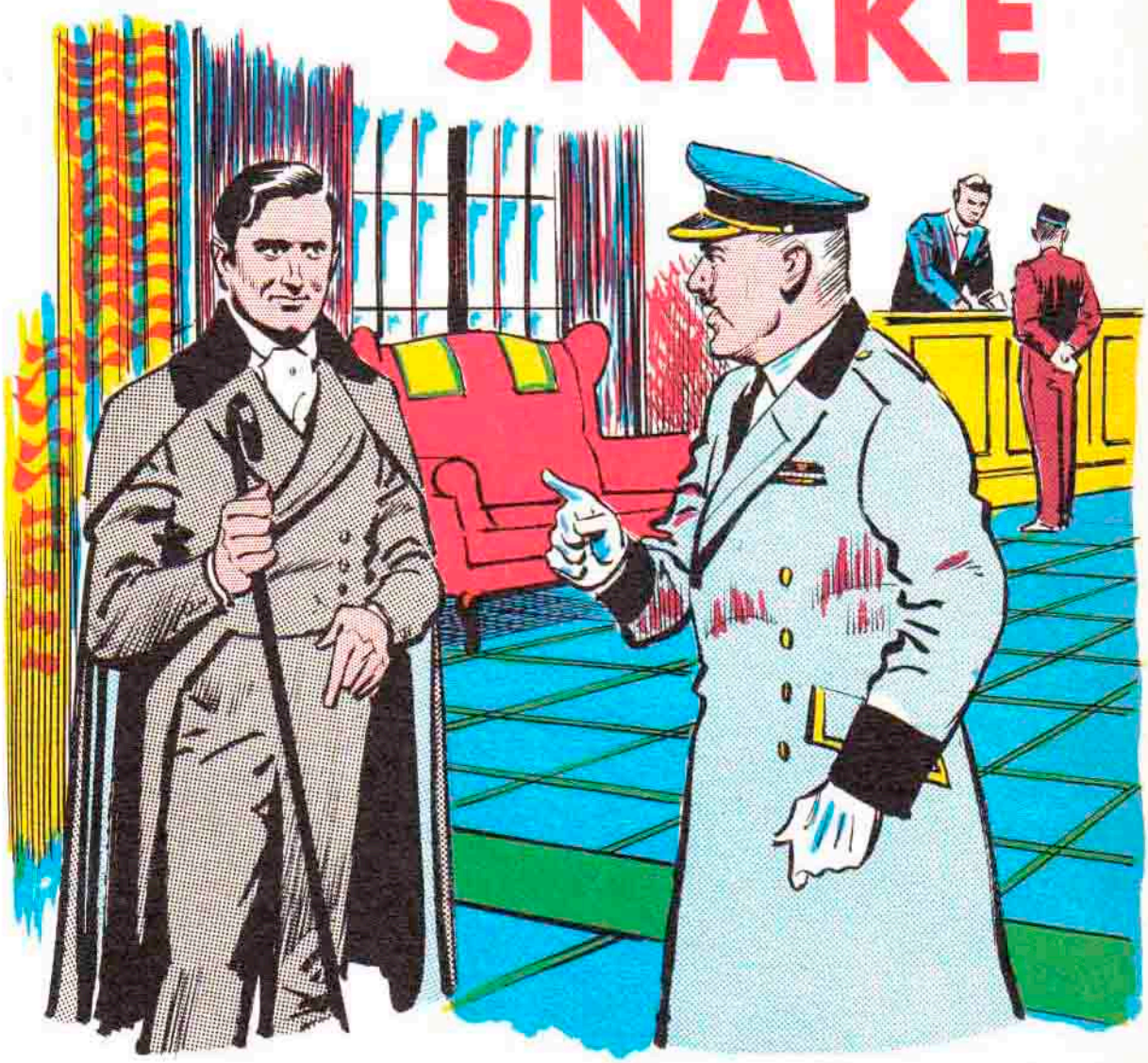
ESCAPE OF THE SNAKE



ADAM Adamant stepped from his taxi, paid the driver, and mounted the steps of the Metro, one of London's largest and most famous hotels. While his town house was being decorated, Adam was using the hotel.

"Evening, George," he said to the uniformed doorkeeper, who gave Adam a smart salute. "You look rather worried."

George glanced cautiously all round him. "I am, sir," he said in a low voice. "I don't

like what's going on in here."

"Indeed! And what is that?"

George looked uncomfortable.

"You'll probably think I'm barmy, sir, but there are two gentlemen staying here with a snake. Imagine it, sir! They've a snake for company."

Adam smiled as he stood with his swordstick at ease and his cloak flowing behind him.

"You surprise me, George. I did not know that gentlemen went about with snakes."

"These two do, sir," said George grimly. "Believe me, they're in Room 240 now. And that there snake is a hooded cobra from India, one of the deadliest reptiles o' the lot. I been in India, meself, sir," George added proudly.

Adam was well aware of George's history. Adam had been in India himself. And he felt a trifle startled by George's news.

"Are you sure you haven't been dreaming, George?"

"Absolutely certain, sir. When the gentlemen came in, each one was carrying a suitcase. And one of the cases came open. Believe me, sir, outa that case there fell a live snake. I nearly jumped outa me skin, sir."

"Well, well!" Adam said. "Every man to his taste, of course. But I would not, myself, fancy spending the night with a hooded cobra."

* * *

Adam went on through the lounge to the lift. While he was travelling up to the third floor, he thought of George's story and became intrigued by it. Was it possible that two guests in the hotel had a live snake with them? Or had George, to use a phrase Adam had heard often in his youth, "not taken enough water with it"?

Adam shook his head.

"No," he said to himself. "George is not a drinker."

It was at that moment that Adam found himself passing the door of Room 240, the room that George had said was occupied by the two gentlemen and the snake. On the spur of the moment, Adam paused and rapped on the door with the head of his swordstick.

The door was opened after a moment by a short, thick-set man wearing spectacles, who peered at Adam as though he disliked seeing him.

"Ya?" he said in a guttural accent. "You want somet'ing?"

Adam, of course, did not want anything except to find out what was going on. But he was quick-witted enough not to say so.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I was wondering if you weren't the famous Herr Snyder?"

The fat little man seemed to swell with importance.

"Iss true," he exclaimed. "I am very famous . . . Ya! But the name iss not Snyder! It iss Kopek . . . Karl Kopek."

"Indeed! How remarkable. I am sorry to trouble you. But I felt I had to ask." Adam was as polite as a diplomat. Karl swung the door wide for him to enter.

"Please to come in," he said. "We are busy, but we like to haf a friend."

* * *

Adam entered the room. He entered cheerfully, swinging his swordstick, then felt a sudden blow on the head that made him dizzy. The blow was followed by another . . . and then another . . . until Adam staggered and lost consciousness. Whatever was going on in that room, it was obvious that Adam was not intended to find out!

Karl Kopek glared at his companion. His companion was as tall and thin as Karl was short and fat.

"You are a fool, Jorgen," Karl snarled. "The gentleman was merely asking polite questions. Und you hit him mit your cosh und knock him silly."

"With very good reason, my friend," said the man called Jorgen. "You do not know him . . . but I do! I have good reason to know him. This is the famous Adam Adamant, the man who is always on the trail of people like us."

Karl turned pale.

"My gootness! What haf I done?"

"You have probably done very well," said Jorgen with a sneer. "You invited him in, and now we have him in our power. He is out to the world at the moment, anyway."

That was true. Adam lay on the floor between them, stunned by the blows he had received from Jorgen's cosh. His swordstick lay beside him, his cloak had flowed out around him.

"We must tie him up and put him somewhere safe," Jorgen continued. "Otherwise, we cannot continue with our experiment."

Vaguely, as though in a dream, Adam felt himself lifted and carried to another room. His senses were returning, but he was not yet fully aware of what was going on. In fact, he was laid on a bed, and his hands and feet were bound with thin cord.

"Now, you fool," Jorgen snarled to Karl, "let us continue with the experiment. Remember, tonight is the night of the masked ball."

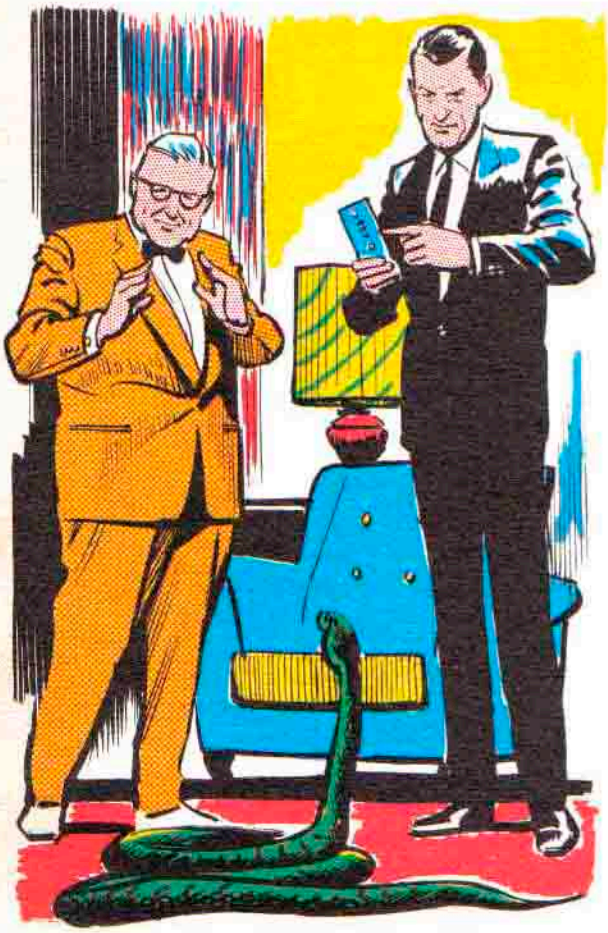
The man named Karl, the little one, looked unhappy.

"I am sorry, Jorgen . . . I am not used to your country."

"It's not my country," Jorgen snarled. "I am simply here to do an important job."

* * *

The two men returned to the other room, where Jorgen started fiddling with a strange



apparatus. As he pressed buttons on something like a small wireless set, the lid of a box opened on the floor and the head of a snake appeared.

Jorgen went on pressing buttons.

"It still works," he exclaimed. "Watch the snake. It will do exactly as I tell it."

The two men stood well clear as the cobra squirmed out of its box. It slid across the floor towards them, then, as Jorgen pressed another button, it seemed to hesitate. Slowly it wriggled around and went in the other direction.

"You see!" Jorgen was triumphant. "Modern science can work wonders. We have full control of that snake. And all because we have fitted electrodes under the skin near its brain."

The cobra certainly seemed to be acting in accordance with Jorgen's orders. Having crossed the room in one direction, it paused and turned round to cross back again. Jorgen was controlling it with a kind of walkie-talkie transmitter.

"It iss goot," said Karl, who was standing well clear. "But now . . . let us hear it speak."

This was a strange request. The long jaws of a snake, like the jaws of most animals, are not flexible enough for speech. But Jorgen merely pressed another button and spoke softly into a microphone.

The effect was startling. Jorgen's words seemed to come from the open jaws of the snake!

"Good evening, Karl," it seemed to say. "How do you do?"

"My gootness!" Karl exclaimed in delight. "That will surprise our friend Mayhew."

"It will do more than surprise him," growled Jorgen. "A man like Mayhew, who believes so fully in voodoo and witchcraft, will do exactly as the snake tells him."

"Unt you will be the one who iss telling him!" cried Karl happily. "My gootness! We will get ourselves a fortune."

Jorgen tested his transmitter again on the snake. By speaking words softly into the microphone, he was able to make the snake appear to be talking. And by pressing the correct buttons, he could more or less control its movements, owing to the electrodes that had been inserted under the skin near its brain.

So the snake appeared to talk. A microphone under the skin of its throat gave this effect.

"It vorks!" Karl cried. "It vorks! Unt ve will be rich! For Mayhew iss a man who controls all Eastern Oil! Unt he vill do exactly as ve tell him."

Karl was not exaggerating. Brandon Mayhew was certainly the man who owned most of Eastern Oil. He was the chairman of the board of directors. And lately he had become obsessed by a belief in strange rites. He believed in witchcraft, in African voodoo, and other things of that nature.

* * *

Karl and Jorgen had been watching him for years. They knew his weakness, and they were determined to profit by it. That was how they had the idea of using a snake with microphones and electrodes attached. After a great deal of experiment, they had discovered a microscopic receiver that would pick up the slightest impulse, and this had been incorporated in the electronic gadgets they had built and placed by operation round the head of the cobra.

It was unfortunate, though, that they had chosen the grand finale to take place in the hotel occupied by Adam Adamant. . . !

* * *

Adam, on recovering his full senses, had been struggling fiercely against the cords that bound him to the bed in the next room. Jorgen and Karl had worked fast, but the cords were firm. Adam was furious with himself for falling into the hands of such people. He had been tied so that his hands were behind him and the cords led under the bed, binding him down firmly to its framework.

A thought occurred to him suddenly. Although the Metro was a most exclusive hotel, its furniture was old-fashioned, and Adam realised suddenly that the bed he was on had an iron framework. He smiled grimly to himself as he started to roll from side to side, causing the cord under the bed to become frayed as it made a sawing motion across the ironwork girders.

"I hope they are sharp enough to cut," Adam thought.

Sure enough, the angle irons were sharp. In less than ten minutes he felt the cords round his wrists snap. It was then a simple matter for him to sit up and work his hands free. Very soon he had unbound his feet, and he rose softly and went to the door of the room in which Karl and Jorgen were still gloating over their good fortune.

Adam turned the door handle with extreme care, pushing the door open an inch at a time. He could see his swordstick, which had been left on the floor where he had fallen, but what interested him more was the final experiment that Karl and Jorgen were making with the cobra. The cobra had reared up, hood distended, and seemed to be speaking to them.

"This is a warning!" it hissed. "If you do not do as I tell you, death . . . a most horrible death . . . will come to you!"

Jorgen rubbed his hands.

"You'd never think," he chuckled, "that I was the one who was speaking those words! You'd never think it was simply a miniature receiving set under the skin of that reptile's throat that was picking up the words!"

"No, my friend," said Adam, pushing the door wide open. "The average man would not think of such a thing. Nor would he think that

you were villainous enough to work such a trick with a snake as poisonous as the hooded cobra. But I know how deadly the cobra is, because I met it in my early days in India, and I say . . . this shall not be."

As he spoke the last four words Adam went into action. His sudden appearance had so startled the pair that they had simply turned and stared at him. But now everybody seemed to move at once.

Adam made a dive for his swordstick, at the same time throwing himself full length in front of the feet of Jorgen, who had leaped towards him. Jorgen very nearly turned a somersault, while Adam grabbed his stick and leaped again to his feet. Karl had made a dive for a gun, which was in the drawer of a desk. But Adam struck him across the wrist with his stick, causing Karl to drop the gun even as he pulled it out of the drawer.

At the same moment, Adam became aware of a dangerous hissing sound behind him. The cobra had reared to strike. Like all of its kind it hissed before doing so, and that was the only thing that saved Adam at that moment.

With a swift movement, Adam brought his stick round so that he struck the snake a blow in the throat. The blow was a violent one, and the cobra was thrown in a writhing coil on the floor.

Next moment Adam had to deal again with the two crooks. Jorgen had risen and seized a chair, which he swung at Adam like a club. Karl, holding his wrist, was prancing round and muttering words in some foreign language. Between the two of them, Adam circled and unsheathed his swordstick.

"I warn you!" he said. "I shall use this sword if necessary. You will do well to keep your distance."

Karl rushed at him, and Adam turned. At the same moment, Jorgen charged with the chair. The four legs of the chair were like the prongs of a fork. One of them struck Adam in

the temple, and Adam saw a whole galaxy of stars. But he still struck with his sword, so that Karl gave a yelp of agony.

"My gootness! I am spiked! Kill him, Jorgen . . . kill him!"

For the second time that evening Adam felt his senses reeling. He struck again, but so did Jorgen. And it was Adam who collapsed. The whole weight of the chair had descended on his head.

* * *

Karl and Jorgen were glaring at each other as Jorgen bound up Karl's right arm, which had received a stab wound from Adam's sword.

"You knew that man!" Karl was saying bitterly. "Why you not bind him tighter?"

"Why did you let him in, in the first place?" snarled Jorgen. "He might have ruined everything."

He finished the binding, then glared at Adam, who was lying on the floor. Adam was tough, but two knockouts in one evening had put him into a real coma.

"What we do wit' him, then?" demanded Karl.

"Drop him in the pit. We'll put him in the trunk we brought our gear in, and carry it out between us to the car."

"But mine arm! It is almost useless!"

"Use the other one then," said Jorgen callously. "Help me get him in."

Between the two of them, Karl groaning from the wound in his arm, they lifted the inert figure of Adam into the iron-bound trunk, which had contained the radio apparatus for their snake experiments. But the hotel room was not the place where they had made their

original experiments . . . that was the pit that Jorgen had referred to as a disposal place for Adam.

When Adam was in the trunk, Jorgen suddenly pounced on his swordstick and sheath. Sliding the two together, he threw them into the trunk with the unconscious figure of Adam.

"Mustn't leave any evidence for the police," he muttered.

Presently, looking like ordinary hotel guests departing, Jorgen and Karl went down in the lift with the trunk in which they had placed Adam. As they passed George, the doorkeeper, Jorgen smiled pleasantly.

"Back later," he said. "We have some things to collect."

This was true, for they had their radio apparatus still in the room they had been occupying. But, for the moment, they loaded the trunk into the boot of a large car, and drove off rapidly to the place where they had conducted their original experiments.

This was a dilapidated area. All the buildings were due for demolition, and there was nobody about. They unloaded the trunk from the car and carried it with many gasps into a tall building that was half-demolished. In this building they went down some stone steps and presently arrived at a kind of pit.

The pit had originally been a basement, two floors below the street. It was thus about twenty feet deep, and, as they stared down into it from the edge, Karl gave a shudder.

"Iss a nasty death for any man," he muttered.

"Don't be a fool," snarled Jorgen. "Help me tip him out."

Adam felt himself falling. He was still in a dazed condition, but stunning blows have strange effects. Had he not been moved, he might have remained unconscious for hours. As it was, he felt the sudden descent as he was thrown into the pit and was shocked into full wakefulness as he hit the bottom. A moment later his swordstick descended beside him.

"That's the lot," growled Jorgen. "If the police ask any questions, we know nothing. Adam must have wandered in here and fallen down that hole . . . cloak, swordstick and everything."

Karl and Jorgen departed. They had a job to do, and they had to do it that night. Brandon Mayhew, the oil king they had selected as their victim, was giving a masked ball that evening at his large house in one of London's famous squares, and they had to be there in time with their snake!

* * *

Adam's senses were reeling. He tried to figure out where he was, but could not do so. Was he dreaming? Was he in some kind of nightmare? A soft hissing sound near him jerked him suddenly into wakefulness.

It was not yet dark. The last rays of daylight penetrated even to this double basement in the condemned building. And Adam felt his swordstick beside him as he rose to his feet. He grasped it thankfully.

"Where am I?" he asked himself. "What has happened?"

There was no answer to either question. All he heard was that same hissing, a hissing that jerked him suddenly into action.

Where had he heard it before? Why, in the hotel room where two men were dealing with a snake! The mist cleared from Adam's brain and he saw clearly where he was. And Adam had never in his life been in such a deadly situation.

He was in a snake pit!

All around him there were reptiles. There were large snakes and small snakes. There was a python and a boa-constrictor. The horrible creatures were all round him. In the light of the dying day he saw them clearly. They were the snakes that Karl and Jorgen had experimented on before finally finding out how to influence the things with electronic waves.

Adam's sword flashed out and he struck about him. His blade was mainly for stabbing, like the rapier, but he used it also for cutting. If it did not cut, at least it stunned the snakes that reared at him. How long the battle lasted he could not think, but, presently, when he counted the writhing victims around him, he felt it could not have been more than a few minutes.

"Ten of them!" he gulped. "Ten of the most

horrible things I have met in my life. It must have been those two villains who put me here . . . Karl and Jorgen. But what is their purpose? Why are they doing such things? I heard something of their plans," Adam went on, talking to himself, "but not enough. I must get back to that hotel. Yes . . . but first . . . how do I get out of here?"

With the deadly reptiles all round him, some of them still writhing in their death-throes, Adam felt his way round the walls of the basement. It did not take him long to realise that this was a condemned building, for some of the bricks were crumbling, and some had fallen out altogether.

Adam began hurriedly to make use of the gaps as hand and footholds. With his sword-stick over his arm, he mounted a few feet, then had to dig another handhold among the loose brickwork. The brick came out eventually and he continued his climb.

* * *

He was almost exhausted when he reached the top. But he reached it, and that was enough for Adam. Lying flat and gasping for a minute or two, he rose and found his way out into the street.

It was strange to come into a London full of traffic and theatre-goers after such an experience. Adam signalled a passing taxi and directed the driver to the Metro Hotel.

"You look rough, guv'nor," said the

driver. "Watcher been doing to yerself?"

"Learning something about the ways of villainy," Adam replied cheerfully. "Please wait for me when we arrive at the Metro."

The driver asked no more questions. He drove Adam back to the hotel, and once again Adam mounted the steps. George the doorkeeper stared at him as though Adam were a ghost.

"Coo!" he said. "How many times you come in tonight, sir? I never see you go out!"

"There are reasons for that, George," said Adam calmly. "Tell me, have the guests in Room 240 returned yet?"

"Yes, sir. They came in about half an hour ago. They're changing to go to the masked ball given by Sir Brandon Mayhew."

"Thank you, George," said Adam. "I think I'll wait in my taxi."

Adam went back to the taxi. It was the best place for him to wait for the men who had tried to kill him. He told the driver to pull along farther and then sat quietly until he saw Karl and Jorgen appear. The pair were dressed for the ball. They wore dinner jackets and black ties. Adam waited till they had called a cab, then spoke quietly to his own driver.

"Follow the cab in front," he said.

* * *

Karl and Jorgen were quite pleased with themselves. You would never have thought they had just tried to kill a man. They were obsessed by the thought of becoming rich.

They carried the snake coiled up in a smallish bag. And in Jorgen's pocket was the small transistor transmitter, or walkie-talkie, that he intended to use to make the snake "talk".

It did not occur to either of them that anything had gone wrong with their plan. They took no notice of the cab that was following them, and were as polite as any other guest when they arrived at the town house of Sir Brandon Mayhew. Adam waited till they had disappeared inside, then went up the steps himself. He had no invitation, but Adam was so well known that the butler passed him in without comment.

"You will find a selection of masks on the hall table, sir," he smiled.

"Thank you," said Adam, and chose a black mask long enough to conceal the whole of his features.

But Adam's appearance on the scene was not the only thing that had gone wrong in the scheme of Karl and Jorgen. True, Adam had caused an upset when he had whipped the snake with his swordstick before being knocked out in the hotel; but neither Karl nor Jorgen . . . and certainly not Adam . . . was aware that this had done anything but stop the snake from attacking him.

It was Jorgen who first noticed that some-

thing was wrong. This was when, having obtained a private dressing room for himself and his friend to don their masks, he opened the bag they had brought and let the cobra flop out on to the floor. The snake seemed stupid. Jorgen opened out his walkie-talkie set and spoke a few words into it.

Of course, he expected the words to be given forth by the hidden microphone in the snake's neck, but the result was not what he expected. Instead of any sound, there was a dead silence.

"What has gone wrong?" he snarled.

He tried again, with the same result. The snake seemed stupefied. Adam's blow on the neck had disorganised its microphone. Suddenly, however, it reared up and spoke words that Jorgen had never intended it to speak.

"Try Corncrake's Corn Cure," it said. "It's Wonderful for Tired Feet."

Karl and Jorgen were both stunned by this announcement, but the snake was only just beginning to get into its stride. It played a tune that is well known on Television, after which it started to advertise a famous detergent.

"Nothing washes whiter than Whitefoam," it announced. "See how lovely and soft Whitefoam makes your hands."

Then it made a violent movement towards Jorgen, who dropped his walkie-talkie set and gave a howl.

"Keep it off, Karl," he howled. "It's on the wrong wavelength."

"I vos keeping myself off it," said Karl, who appeared to be trying to climb the wall. "Open der door . . . ve don't want him in here."

Jorgen was in such a panic he did exactly as Karl suggested and bolted out of the door as soon as he had opened it.

"Help!" he yelled, racing along the corridor.

* * *

Adam was in the process of fixing his mask. As Jorgen was already masked, Adam did not realise who he was, but, as soon as he saw the snake, Adam whipped out his sword. Unfortunately, the snake did not come his way. Instead, playing a well-known advertising tune, it writhed and flopped its way along the corridor in the opposite direction.

* * *

This corridor was a long and narrow one. It led to the butler's pantry, which was behind the ornate and curved stairway that gave access to the ballroom above. As Adam chased the snake, the door at the end of the corridor opened, and a footman appeared bearing a tray with drinks.

The snake reared before the footman and hissed at him.

"Have you thought about your holidays yet?" it cried, glaringly angrily at him.

The footman appeared to go into a sort of nervous dance. He lost the balance of his tray, and drinks of all descriptions descended on the snake.

"YOOOOOOOOO!" said the footman unhappily.

The tray descended as well. It crashed down on the hooded cobra, and Adam lost sight of the reptile as he raced to the rescue. Adam grabbed the footman by the arm.

"Keep still!" Adam snapped. "Don't make a movement."

The footman was incapable of any kind of movement, except the one that he was making unconsciously. He was trembling like a leaf.

"I'm off me head, sir," he groaned.

Adam whisked the tray away off the floor with the tip of his sword. He expected to find the snake underneath, but this was not so. The snake had disappeared!

Adam was bewildered. How had the snake vanished after the tray and the drinks had descended on it? The footman suddenly supplied the answer.

"Coo!" he gasped. "He must have fallen into that lift shaft!"

"What lift shaft?" Adam snapped.

"Why, the one that leads to Sir Brandon's study," cried the footman. "We daren't go up there when he wants to sit quiet. He won't come down to the ball himself. But I was about to send those drinks up to him on that tray."

The mystery suddenly became clear to Adam. This was a service lift, and the snake must have writhed aside and gone up in it instead of the drinks!

"Quick, man!" Adam exclaimed. "How do I get to Sir Brandon?"

"You can't, sir," gulped the footman. "His room is locked when he is engaged in his studies, and this lift is the only way in."

Adam startled the footman almost as much as the snake had done.

"Bring the lift back then," he snapped. "I am going up in it myself."

* * *

It was a tight squeeze. The lift was empty when it came down at the pressure of a button, but it was only a service lift, and Adam had to hunch himself up to get inside. This he managed, however, and felt himself rising to the great man's study.

* * *

Meantime, Sir Brandon had been reading one of his favourite books. Although he was giving the masked ball, he did not attend the affair himself until the end. And, at that moment, he was very happy as he sat in his study with a book on "Strange Cults of the East."

It was while he was doing so that the lift which should have contained a bottle and glasses came into view and the snake flopped out of it. Sir Brandon stared at the snake with interest and horror. The snake brought with it a Top of the Pops tune, and seemed to be getting madder than ever, probably because it couldn't stand the noise.

But Sir Brandon rose to his feet and stared at the reptile in amazement. The snake reared up and hissed at him.

"How Do You Like Your Eggs Done?" it inquired. "Poached, Fried or Scrambled?"

Sir Brandon felt dizzy. Then he backed away as the cobra came towards him. Sir Brandon had spent some time in India himself, and he knew the deadliness of the cobra.

"Heavens!" he exclaimed. "What is this?"

It was shortly afterwards that Adam appeared. Adam had ascended in a huddled position in the service lift, but now he leaped from it with his sword unsheathed.

"Keep still, sir!" he cried. "Don't make a move."

It was good advice. The hooded, deadly cobra was only a few feet from Sir Brandon, rearing its body to strike, and Adam knew that the slightest disturbance would make it sink its fangs in the body of the oil tycoon.

Adam looked round wildly. He dare not make too sudden a move himself. But Sir

Brandon's study was like a museum. All round the walls there were objects of Eastern and African origin. It was obvious that Sir Brandon was a great student of the occult. Blowpipes, musical instruments, shields, shrunken heads . . . all these and many more were in profusion. Adam snatched at a reed pipe that was hanging on the wall close beside him. It was the sort of pipe that the Indian Snake Charmers he had known in his youth, had used.

Adam put the reed pipe to his lips and started to play. A wailing tune came forth, clashing with the modern tunes that were coming from the miniature microphone attached to the snake's throat. The snake, in the act of striking, seemed to hesitate as its red eyes glared at Sir Brandon.

It began to sway gently to the tune that Adam was playing. Adam's tune was not as loud as the microphone on the snake, but it was far more soothing. The snake seemed undecided whether to strike at Sir Brandon or not.

Cautiously Adam crept up behind it. The snake was now only a few inches from Sir Brandon, and Sir Brandon could not retreat any further, for his ornate desk was behind him. He stared with glazed eyes at the hypnotic swaying of the snake.

Holding the reed pipe in one hand, Adam grasped his sword firmly. Then, making a lithe spring, he struck like lightning at the rearing cobra.

The result was certain. Adam's stroke killed the cobra instantly, and Sir Brandon put a hand to his forehead as he saw the reptile's body writhing on the floor.

"My dear sir!" he gasped. "Who are you?"

"You ought to know me, Sir Brandon," Adam replied. "But that does not matter at the moment. I have further work to do. Perhaps you will unlock the door of your study for me."

Sir Brandon did so, still dazed from his recent experience. As though in a trance, he watched Adam race down the stairs. Music was still sounding from the ballroom, where the guests were dancing and enjoying themselves, unaware of the near-tragedy that had occurred in the study.

* * *

Adam was after Karl and Jorgen. He had a long score to settle with them. First he raced to the door of the dressing room from which the snake had first appeared. Here he found Karl Kopek, who was looking bewildered by all that had occurred.

"You will come with me, Karl," Adam said grimly. "Think yourself lucky that your actions have not resulted in any deaths."

"Ya, ya!" groaned Karl, whose mind was in a whirl. "You means my deaths . . . yes, no?"

"No!" snapped Adam, pushing him ahead as they left the cloakroom.

Jorgen, the other crook, was not far away. After rushing out and shouting for help, he had realised that his antics would only draw attention to himself, and that was the last thing he desired. He had therefore retreated to the bar, where he was calming his nerves with a soothing drink.

It was here that Adam found him, and Adam was in no mood for further trouble. Pushing Karl still ahead of him, he presented the tip of his sword to the astonished Jorgen's throat.

"You, also, will come with me," Adam said.

Jorgen looked as though he were about to resist, but the point of the sword made him change his mind. Quietly he went before Adam until they came out into the lobby, where the doorkeeper was surrounded by police. The doorkeeper had seen the snake, and had done the only thing he could think of—dial 999!

"These are the gentlemen you need, Inspector," Adam said politely to the uniformed man who stepped forward. "I will give you all the details later."

"Adam Adamant!" the Inspector exclaimed. "I recognise you, sir. But what in the world has been happening?"

Adam told him briefly. When he had finished, both Karl and Jorgen refused to say a word. They were old hands at the game, and they reserved their defence. But this did not do them much good, for the evidence of the dead snake and the electronic gadgets they had fitted to it was all against them.

"It was a good try," Adam said later. "They had quite a scheme. But I don't think they will try it again. And," he added, smiling, "I don't think Sir Brandon will be as interested in future in these strange cults of Africa and the East. They belong to a bygone age . . . an age that I well remember . . . an age that, strangely enough, I am glad is departing. Let us look forward, gentlemen, to something cleaner and more rational in the future. It is about time!"

* * *

HOLIDAY FOR *Spies*

RADIO signals flashed from the pirate ship anchored off shore. To most people, even if they could read the Morse Code, the signals were gibberish. But to three men in a watch-tower on the coast, they were extremely important.

One man, with earphones clamped to his head, was writing rapidly at a table. The other two watched him intently, and presently the writer ripped a page from his notebook and

handed it to a fleshy, thick-set man who sat opposite.

The thick-set man read the following message:

ADAM ADAMANT IS ON YOUR TRAIL. HE HAS BEEN SIGHTED BY AGENT 231.

The thick-set man made some unprintable remarks.

"That man again!" he snarled. "He should be done away with! He is an absolute menace."

Then he stared again at the message.

"Helmut," he said, "find out where he is and what he is doing. We must stop him before he gets here."

"Yes, Leader," said the telegraphist, and he started tapping rapidly on his instrument. The morse key sent out dots and dashes in the code that was being used.

Presently came the answer.

ADAM IS DRIVING HIS CAR ALONG THE COAST ROAD. HE IS NEARING SQUARE 31.

The Leader gave swift orders. These were swiftly relayed by telephone by the third man at the table.

"You have done it, Kramer?"

"Yes, Leader. Adam Adamant will be stopped by a road block in just two minutes."

* * *

Adam was totally unaware of all this. Indeed, he was not on the trail of anybody. Adam had decided to give himself a holiday by the sea, and it was sheer coincidence that he had been driving his modern car along the coast road.

But Adam had a reputation. Among spies and crooks he was regarded as the man who always interfered with their plans. So, although Adam was merely on holiday, he was beset by men who felt that he should be stopped at all costs.

In the two minutes announced by the Leader in the watch-tower, Adam saw a red light and a horizontal bar ahead. The bar was resting on two tripods, and Adam, like a good citizen, pulled up his car as he came to it.

"Some repairs, I suppose," he said cheerfully to himself. "I wish they'd warned me further back so that I could have chosen another route."

At that moment two men appeared, one from either side. They wore stocking masks over their faces, and Adam stared in astonishment at them. Before he could speak, however, the door beside him was wrenched open, and a hand came in and seized him roughly by his tie, which was tied firmly around his neck. Adam felt himself being hauled forcibly out into the road.

Next thing he felt was a stunning blow on the head. It was a blow that almost knocked him unconscious, but not quite. Dazed, he felt himself being dragged some distance, after which he was pushed into the back of a closed van.

"Okay, Sam," said a voice. "Get moving."

Adam lay in the van wondering what had happened. The van jolted away along the road, and the jolting helped to restore Adam's wits.

"My goodness!" he thought. "What a fine start to my holiday! Have I been mistaken for somebody else?"

Things like that were always happening to Adam Adamant. He lay quiet for a moment, then sat up and felt himself all over.

"No bones broken!" he muttered. "Not even tied up. These chaps who grabbed me must be nut-cases. Wonder what asylum they've escaped from."

Adam felt around in the van for his swordstick, which was his constant companion. But, on this occasion, it seemed to have been left behind. The men who had seized him had left it back in his own car!

Adam was annoyed. To be halted by a road block, pulled out of his own car, then knocked on the head was bad enough. But to find that his favourite weapon had been left behind was too much.

Adam came to a swift resolve. Removing his right shoe, he grasped the toe of it in his right hand, then waited patiently until the closed van came to a stop. As the doors in the back opened and the two men appeared, Adam went into action.

Clonk! Clonk!

The two villains collapsed as Adam struck them forcibly on the head with the heel of his shoe. They sat down dizzily on the ground while Adam climbed calmly from the van.

"You did that to me with something heavier than a shoe," he said sternly. "I have done it twice to you—which is reasonable interest."

Then he looked around him.

He was in a strange, deserted spot. Away to the right of him was the sea. He could see it below the cliff-top on which he found himself, glittering in sunlight. But to the left was a strange old building, one of the ancient watch-towers built when Britain was liable to be invaded. The watch-tower had now been turned into a normal building.

Adam was puzzled. What possible connection could there be between these two modern crooks and an ancient Martello tower?

Suddenly, Adam saw the faint line of an aerial from the tower. He stepped hurriedly into the shadow of the building, because this gave him a clue. Maybe the tower was still being used for some purpose. If he had had his swordstick, he would have felt quite happy. As it was, he looked around for a weapon.

He had replaced his shoe. But now he had another idea. Bushes grew beside him, and he saw a branch that was strangely shaped like a walking stick. Adam quickly produced his pocket-knife and cut the branch from the bush. Then, swinging it like his own stick, he rapped on the wooden door of the building.

"Now," he said to himself, "we shall see what we shall see."

* * *

What Adam saw was something very ordinary. A man opened the door and stared at Adam as though Adam were a ghost. In fact, he was the man named Kramer, and the last person Kramer had been expecting to see was Adam Adamant. Kramer thought that Adam had been taken care of by Sam and the other crook, whose name was Karl. But Sam and Karl had been knocked out by the heel of Adam's shoe.

"Pardon me," Adam said politely to Kramer, "but there appears to have been some slight mistake. Would you happen to know why . . . Ah!"

Adam broke off and acted swiftly, for Kramer had leapt at him. Kramer was in a panic. To find at the door the very man he had been warned against by the Leader was a bit too much for him.

The thick stick Adam had cut from the bush came in very handy. Side-stepping Kramer's rush, Adam brought the stick down heavily on the back of Kramer's head. So Kramer joined Karl and Sam in a somewhat sleepy attitude on the ground.

Adam surveyed the three men with interest. He had not the faintest idea who they were.

"Guilty consciences, I suppose," he murmured at length. "I wonder if they are safe where they are?"

Adam decided that they would be safer in the van. With this thought in mind, he hoisted each man over his shoulder and pushed him into the closed van, after which he slammed the doors and fastened the handle on the outside.

Most people would have felt that this was the

time to call the police. But the spot was a lonely one, and Adam was interested to know what it all meant. So, pushing back the door with his rustic stick, he softly mounted the circular stairs of the stone tower.

There was another door at the top which opened inwards to a small room, in which Helmut, the radio operator, and the Leader were still sitting at their small table. Adam smiled politely at both of them.

"Good afternoon," he said. "I trust I do not intrude. Were you expecting me, or have I called without an appointment?"

For a split second, both the Leader and Helmut were incapable of speech or movement. Then each moved at the same moment. The Leader dived for a gun in the drawer of the table while Helmut rose and rushed at Adam to grapple with him.

Adam was quite prepared for such a reception. The treatment he had received from Sam and Karl had warned him that these men meant him no good. Tripping Helmut with his stick, he ducked aside and dived under the table as the Leader rose with a gun in his fist, so that he was able to seize the man's feet and drag them towards him.

The result was chaos. The gun banged, the Leader was jerked on to his back, and Adam rose and threw the table behind him. Also, he pinned the Leader with his stick, the Leader looking terrified because he thought it was Adam's swordstick.

At the same time, the table stopped Helmut once again from grappling with Adam. Adam turned and menaced both men with his stick.

"I am displeased with you," he said politely. "You seem determined to spoil my holiday. I don't know your reason for doing so, but I suspect some villainy. Kindly stay where you are or I shall be forced to deal roughly with you."

Both Helmut and the Leader stayed quiet. They knew Adam's reputation, and neither realised that all he held in his hand was a branch of a bush. Adam smiled as he saw their confusion.

"Perhaps you will now enlighten me as to the cause of all this?" he suggested.

There was a grim silence. Helmut, with the table half-covering him, stared at the Leader. The Leader stared back at Helmut. The Leader had dropped his gun, and did not feel inclined to go for it. He felt he was still under the threat of Adam's "swordstick".

* * *

For a few moments there was silence. Both crooks remained on the floor, glaring at Adam. Then, into that silence, there came a curious buzzing sound. It was the morse tapper that Helmut had been using. Somebody was sending him a message.

Adam was quick to seize his opportunity. Still flourishing the branch he had cut as his "swordstick", he grabbed the code book that Helmut had been using. From this he was able to decipher the message.

The message read:

WHAT HAS HAPPENED? HAVE YOU DEALT WITH ADAM? AGENTS 232 AND 233 HAVE BEEN ALERTED. THEY ARE ON THE WAY TO HELP.

Adam stared grimly at the message. He knew now that he had stumbled on to some spy ring. He did not know where the message had come from, but he was determined to find out.

"My friends," he said, as he rose and swung his 'stick', "may I ask a polite question? Who are you, and who has sent this message?"

The Leader and Helmut remained obstinately silent.

"Very well then," Adam said. "You leave me no alternative but to find out my own way."

Adam tapped the morse key rapidly. Reading from the code book, he sent back a request to the mysterious sender of the previous message.

PLEASE GIVE ALL NECESSARY INFORMATION.

The information came immediately.

WE ARE AWAITING YOUR REPORT ON THE POSITION OF WESTERN DEFENCES. AGENTS 232 AND 233 ARE NEARING YOUR HEADQUARTERS.

Adam stared grimly at this message. Then, alerted by a step on the stairs, he leapt to his feet. Agents 232 and 233 were approaching!

The two new agents had a real Adam welcome. As they entered the room, guns in hand, they received two blows on the head that sent them reeling forward. Although Adam's "stick" had no sword in it, Adam had used it valiantly from behind the door as a cudgel.

But the entry of the agents had given some chance to Helmut and the Leader. These two had remained quiet while menaced by what they thought was a swordstick. But now they leaped into action. Their intention was to finish Adam as soon as possible.

* * *

Adam had different ideas. He threw Helmut with a judo trick, then turned swiftly on the Leader.The latter had seized the gun he had dropped, but Adam knocked it rapidly out of his hand. For all that, Adam was at a disadvantage. The men who had entered the room were only stunned, and he knew that he could not continue the fight indefinitely.

Adam ran swiftly down the stairs. He knew now what these men were doing, he knew also the wavelength on which they were transmitting their information. Indeed, he knew that they had been about to send such information that some foreign power would know the details of our defences! It was up to him to stop that information reaching the people who had demanded it.

Adam sprang into the van that had brought him to this old Martello tower that had been turned into a place of habitation. The key was still in the starter, and he turned it and drove away before the men could reach him. He was driving without knowing the people they were in touch with, but he had a simple way of finding out.

As the van sped down the road, he was thinking rapidly. In his mind was the wavelength they had been using, and he knew that he would soon be able to discover the user. Because all wavelengths on radio are known to the Postmaster General!

Adam drove to the nearest town, which was the seaside town of Ipsey, on the East Coast. Here, amid holiday-makers and happy crowds, he pulled up at the nearest Post Office. Leaping from the van, he ran into the Post Office and pushed his way to the counter.

"Hoy!" gasped a customer. "Why don't you take your turn?"

Adam took no notice. Instead, he thrust his card under the grill, and on it he had written the words:

THIS IS AN EMERGENCY. PLEASE TELL ME THE STATION BROADCASTING ON 21 METRES.

The man behind the grill stared blankly at Adam's card. Then, looking up, he spoke softly:

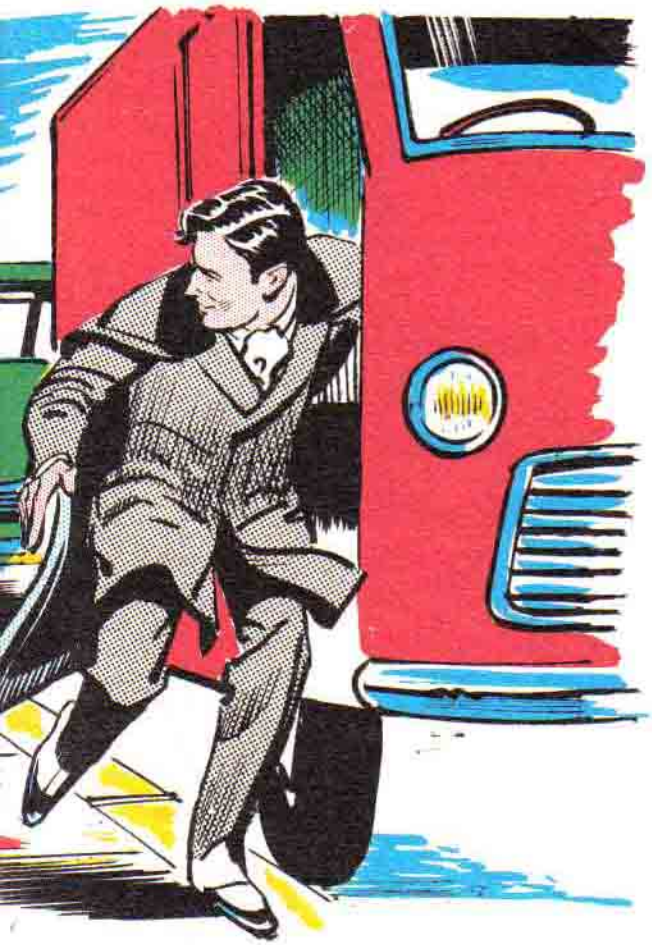
"That's the pirate radio station off shore, sir.

Everybody knows that in this town."

"Thank you," said Adam. "I happen to be a visitor."

* * *

Adam ran from the Post Office, thinking out his next move. This, of course, was to warn the authorities that that particular wavelength was being used for espionage. But, as he emerged into Ipsey High Street, he saw that the spies had followed him. Behind the van he had driven there was a big car, and he recognised the men in it. They were the Leader, Helmut and the two men who had entered the room in the tower—agents 232 and 233. What was worse, they were all now armed. The guns they carried were pointed straight at Adam.



Adam threw himself flat on the pavement. As a result, the bullets from the guns passed harmlessly over him. Screams sounded from some of the people passing, but nobody was hurt. Adam rolled aside and spun over and over until he had reached the van. Then, reaching for the door handle, he scrambled inside.

It was touch-and-go whether he got away with the manoeuvre, for the crooks immediately turned their fire on the van. But the solid body of the van behind him shielded Adam from their shots, and Adam turned the van rapidly out into the traffic of the High Street.

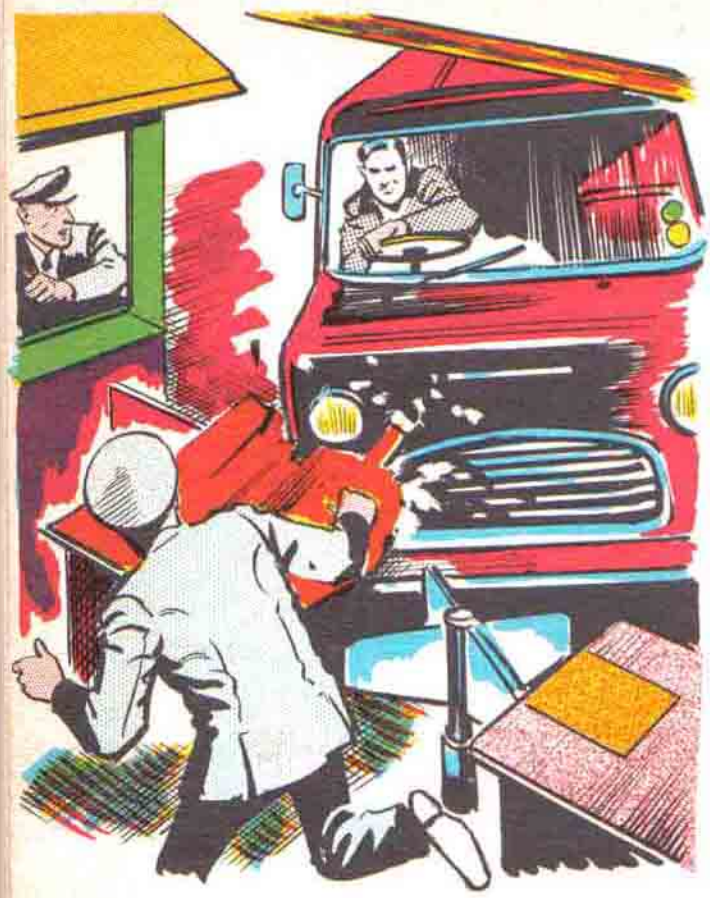
"So those messages are coming from that pirate radio vessel," he said to himself. "Everybody knows their wave-length, but not everybody knows the code they are using. I was lucky to find that code book in the tower. I wonder how they are passing on the information gained to their employers?"

Even as he asked himself the question, Adam knew the answer. It would be quite simple. The pirate vessel was playing records, and there would be another code used in the words of the announcer who introduced those records. He would be saying something quite simple, but the words would mean something quite different.

* * *

Adam felt grim as he weaved the van in and out of the traffic. From time to time he glanced in his rear-view mirror, expecting the car behind him any moment to try to get ahead, but this did not happen. On the contrary, he had to jam on his brakes suddenly as he saw the car ahead!

The crooks knew the town better than Adam. They had turned down a sidestreet and driven ahead of him. Now, with the big car blocking



his path, Adam had to come to a halt.

For a split second he was undecided how to act. He knew that he could not get past the guns of the spies. But, glancing swiftly around, he saw that he had reached a point where he might be able to turn aside.

* * *

On his right was the entrance to Ipsey Pier. It was not an entrance for cars, being simply a series of turnstiles, but Adam had to make use of it. Spinning the wheel, he drove across the pavement and, to the sound of yells and screams, charged the turnstiles for pedestrians only. "I'm having a real holiday at last," he told himself grimly. "I'm going on to the Pier. All the fun of the fair, they say, with boating, surf-riding and minstrels thrown in. Here's hoping I don't hurt anyone."

* * *

Cr-r-r-rrrrrrash!

Adam certainly went on to the Pier. The van went through the turnstiles like a tank. The men in charge of them scattered as they saw him approach, and the turnstiles suffered considerable damage as the van hit them.

But Adam was prepared for the crash. He had the door of the driving cab open and flung himself aside and out of it at the moment of impact. Sprawling, he found himself on the planks—or deck—of the Pier, after which he sprang to his feet and raced into the Fun Fair.

The spies were close behind him. They had left their car and were racing on foot to head him off. But Adam succeeded in getting into the Fun Fair Arcade before they could catch him. It was a question of who could think the fastest.

Adam was fairly good at quick thinking. He raced through the Arcade of juke boxes and one-armed bandits until he reached an object known as the Slippery-Slip. This was a thing down which people slid on mats amid shrieks of laughter. But the shrieks were rather different when Adam seized a mat without paying for it and threw himself on to the slippery slope.

"Curse him!" snarled the Leader, who was close behind. "Do you know anything about this foolish sport, Helmut?"

"Yes, Leader," said Helmut unhappily. "It is the sort of thing beloved by these people."

"Then show me how to get after that man!" snarled the Leader.

Adam had already reached the bottom before the Leader had grabbed his mat, so he was now on the lower deck of the Pier. Tumbling to his feet, he raced away along the deck until he came to a notice-board offering speed-boat rides and water-ski-ing. In haste, Adam grabbed a pair of skis and thrust some money into the hand of the attendant.

"I don't always travel without paying," he said cheerfully. "I will reimburse those people on the Slippery-Slip when I have time."

Seconds later Adam was following a speed-boat on the water-skis he had strapped on his feet. He glanced over his shoulder and saw that both Helmut and the Leader were following him.

"This will give them a little exercise," Adam thought.

Suddenly, he saw that the speed-boat that was towing him was heading out to sea. And away beyond it, almost on the skyline, was an anchored vessel. Could this be the pirate vessel that the spies were using for their messages?

Adam decided that it was more than likely. When the speed-boat swerved to bring him back to the Pier, Adam threw himself from the skis and managed to slide his feet out of the straps.

He had had a brainwave. He would swim to the pirate vessel and make sure what was happening. As he went under, a second speed-boat roared up behind him, towing the Leader. The driver of the boat, knowing nothing of the scheme behind it all, slowed down with the idea of picking Adam out of the water.

* * *

But Adam had no intention of being picked up by the boat that was towing the Leader. Shedding his cloak, and throwing away his "stick", he dived downwards taking a deep breath. It was not merely an attempt to avoid capture, but another piece of quick-thinking on Adam's part.

For, underwater, he was able to swim a few strokes back to the Leader, who was staring around as his tow-boat slowed down. Next moment, the Leader gave a gasp as his water-skis were seized by hands from under the surface and twisted sideways so that he was also given a ducking.

"Now we will see who is the better swimmer," Adam thought to himself.

There followed a strange scene off the Pier at Ipsey. Several boats started looking for the two men who had disappeared from water-skis. But Adam kept diving and swimming under water so that he could not be found.

The Leader had realised Adam's intention, which was to reach the pirate vessel, and he was swimming furiously in pursuit. He was gasping, though, for he was not in such good condition as Adam, and soon he was far behind. It was for this reason that he was the only one who was nearly "rescued" by the boats who were looking for them.

* * *

"Here you are, sir," cried an honest boatman, coming alongside and trying to grasp the Leader. "We'll have you on board and safe as houses

in about two ticks, sir."

"Damn you!" snarled the Leader as he was hauled on board, "I don't want to be safe. I want to reach that vessel."

The boatman thought the man's misfortunes had turned his brain. He found a tarpaulin and tried to throw it over the Leader as the latter, spouting water, lay in the stern of his boat. But to his astonishment he found himself staring down the muzzle of a gun!

"Take me out to that vessel," the Leader snarled. "Do as I say or it will be the end of you."

The boatman was bewildered. He held the tarpaulin and stared blankly at the gun.

"That's a dangerous weapon, sir," he gasped. "I think you would do better to put it away and let me take you ashore."

Crack!

The boatman gasped as a bullet whistled past his ear.

"Do as I say!" snarled the Leader. "Next time I'll aim for your head."

The boatman dropped the tarpaulin and turned to the tiller. He was an ordinary long-shoreman, and could not think what was happening. All he knew was that there seemed to be a madman in his boat with a gun, and he did as he was told to save his own life.

Meantime, Adam had been swimming rapidly. He was nearing the pirate ship, which was anchored fore and aft. Strong chains led from the foredeck and the stern to anchors buried deeply in the sand.

Adam chose the stern chain as his means of getting on board. Swimming up to it, he grasped it firmly with both hands, then began his climb.

* * *

It was an arduous climb. Adam hung under the sloping chain as he wormed his way slowly up it. A man on deck had seen him and was waiting at the taffrail to find out the meaning of the intrusion. At any other time, Adam would have dealt with him politely, but he

knew that this was the vessel that had been causing all the trouble.

As a result, Adam was not the least bit polite. As he scrambled on deck, he used a judo trick on the seaman that put the man flat out on his back. Then Adam raced along the deck to the radio cabin. It was from here that the vessel was broadcasting.

A man was emerging as Adam approached, and Adam dealt with him in the same way that he had dealt with the sailor. Adam could not afford to be gentle. He entered the cabin and found there a disc jockey about to play a record. The jockey was speaking into a microphone.

"We are calling all stations," he said. "The news you are about to receive is very important. Numbers. . . . Aaaagh!"

He did not mention any numbers, for Adam was on to him. Adam had guessed that those numbers would convey the secret information that the spies on shore had gathered for him. The disc jockey collapsed as Adam used his judo trick for the third time.

Adam seized the mike.

"Calling all defence stations of the United Kingdom," he snapped. "This ship is a secret espionage station and is endeavouring to broadcast secrets of defence. I will myself endeavour to put it out of action."

* * *

Adam could not know that his words were heard all over the British Isles. He could only hope so. Having spoken, he looked around anxiously for some means of putting the whole set out of action.

At first he saw no means whatever. The cabin was a mass of switches and consoles. And Adam was no electronics expert. Such things had not been known in his day. But there was still the stool on which the disc jockey had been seated.

Adam grabbed the stool and set to work with

it. He brought it down violently on the apparatus around him, smashing everything in sight. In half-a-dozen swipes, he seemed to have made a shambles of the place, after which he suddenly found himself facing the villainous-looking Leader, who had climbed aboard by ladder from the boat he had forced to bring him there.

* * *

The Leader was carrying a gun, but Adam had already started a swing with the stool. The gun cracked, the stool smashed into the Leader, and then there was a rough-and-tumble in which Adam was an expert. He threw the Leader through the cabin door, saw him roll across the deck, saw also that other men were running to the Leader's assistance.

Adam looked round wildly. Then he hurled the stool at them. It was a tall one, and it knocked two men over as they ran towards him. A third man came on. He looked like the captain, and his features were furious.

Adam realised that he meant murder. He had no gun, but he was an enormous man, powerfully built, and he could have broken Adam's back with one hug. But Adam threw himself at the man's feet and legs in an old-fashioned rugger tackle, bringing him down with a crash to the deck. The captain gasped and lay silent.

Adam rose to his feet. He looked over the side, and saw another boat approaching, a boat filled with the men who had tried to capture him on shore. In a few moments they would be on board, and they also had guns.

Adam came to a quick decision. If he could not keep the men off the ship, he would keep the ship away from the men. With the knowledge of ships he had gained in the past, Adam knew where to find the bo'sun's locker. Here he found a hacksaw, and raced forward with it to the anchor chain. Using the hacksaw, Adam sawed at a link in the chain as the boat approached.

He sprang aside as the chain parted, then raced to the stern, where he began work on the stern chain. The ship was already swinging on the tide, and the men in the boat were in confusion. They saw the large vessel bearing down on them.

In a few moments the stern chain had parted, and Adam had the satisfaction of feeling the ship drift away on the current. The men in the boat had turned about to save themselves being overrun by it.

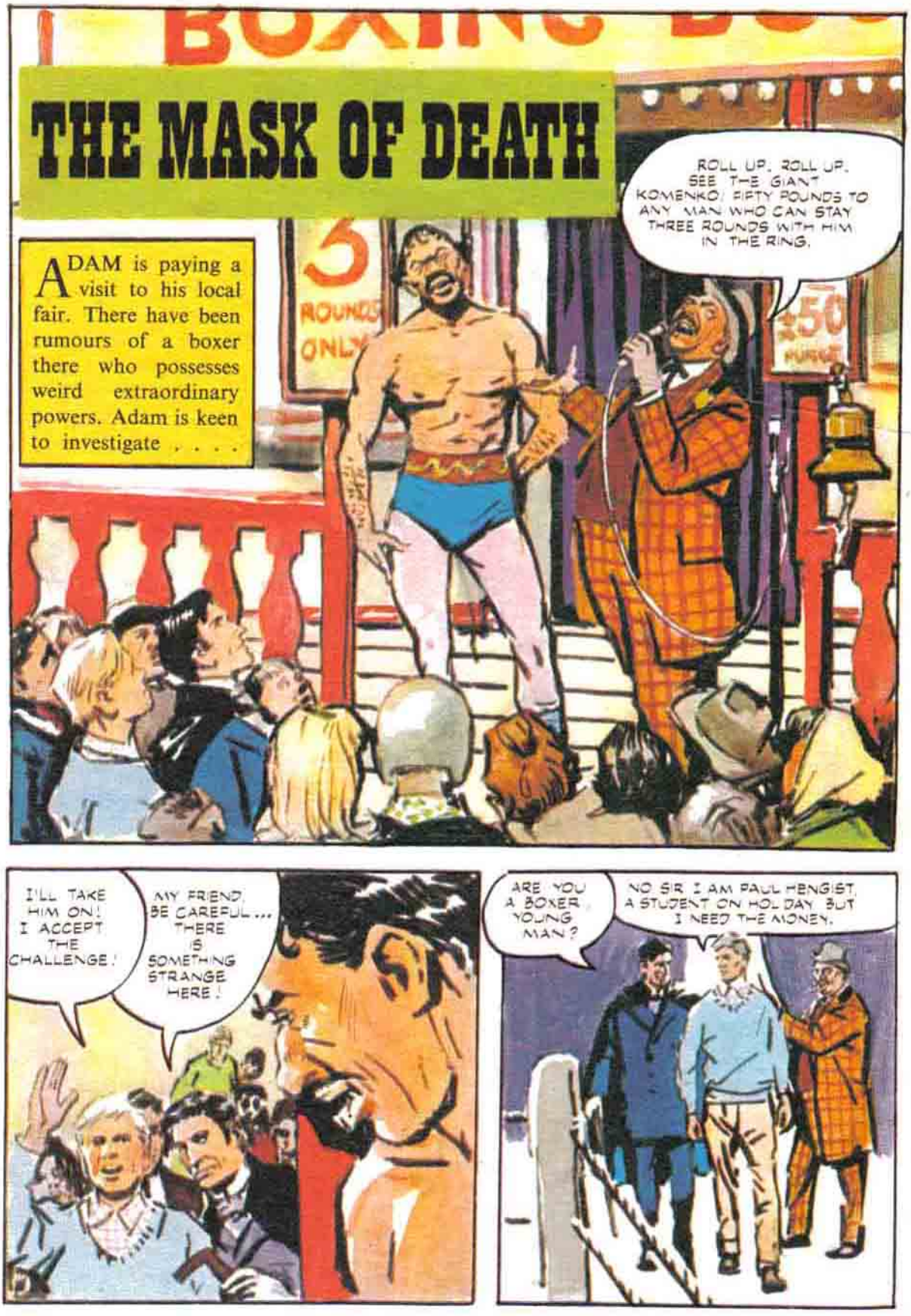
"So that's that," Adam said to himself. "We shan't do any damage as a drifting hulk, as the wind is setting off shore and very soon there will be a navy vessel here."

* * *

Adam was right. The navy had been alerted, and a naval tug was soon on the scene. It took the pirate vessel in tow, with the original crew thoroughly under control. The crooks in the motor launch were arrested by a harbour patrol vessel.

"I did not expect to spend a holiday like this," Adam said later. "I was travelling very peacefully to see some friends of mine. I shall still see them . . . and I trust that I shall be in time for dinner."

* * *


THE MASK OF DEATH
ADAM is paying a visit to his local fair. There have been rumours of a boxer there who possesses weird extraordinary powers. Adam is keen to investigate . . . .
ROLL UP, ROLL UP, SEE THE GIANT KOMENKO! FIFTY POUNDS TO ANY MAN WHO CAN STAY THREE ROUNDS WITH HIM IN THE RING.
3 ROUNDS ONLY
$50 PURSE
I'LL TAKE HIM ON! I ACCEPT THE CHALLENGE!
MY FRIEND, BE CAREFUL... THERE IS SOMETHING STRANGE HERE!
ARE YOU A BOXER YOUNG MAN?
NO SIR I AM PAUL HENGIST, A STUDENT ON HOLIDAY BUT I NEED THE MONEY.

I MUST WATCH THIS CLOSELY. THAT YOUNG MAN IS IN DANGER.
YOU'VE GOT PLUCK, SON.
GO IN AND WIN BOY.
AAAGH!
GO YOUR STUFF, KO... LET HIM HAVE IT.
NO ...NO! I'M CRAZY! KEEP OFF!

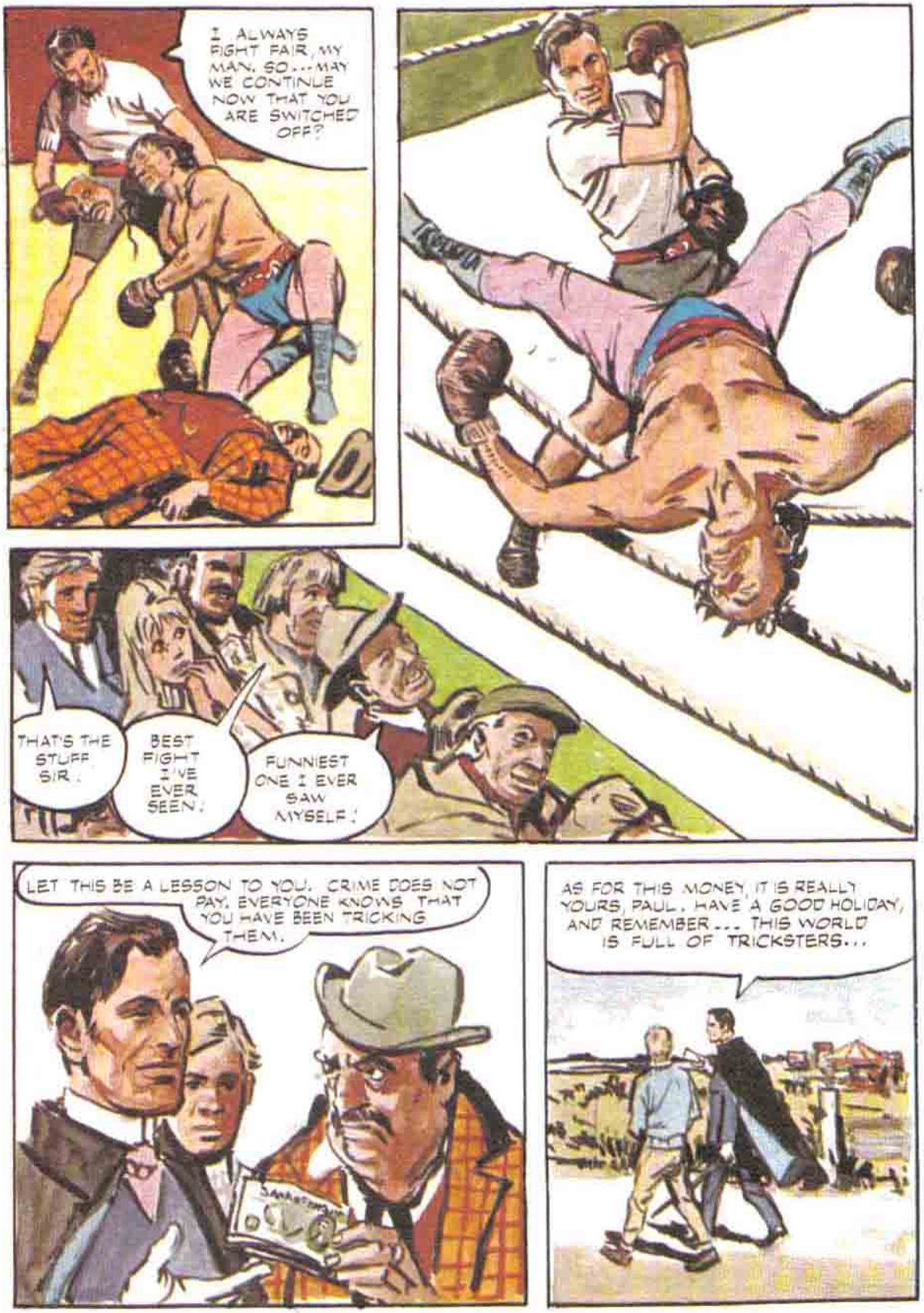
THAT'LL DO FOR YOU.
HE'S DEAD! THEY'VE KILLED HIM.
NOT QUITE--- I THINK I'M JUST IN TIME.
DON'T TALK YET, MY FRIEND... JUST TAKE A SIP OF THIS. YOU SEEMED TO GO TO PIECES ALL OF A SUDDEN.
IT WAS HORRIBLE, LIKE A NIGHTMARE. HIS FACE SEEMED SUDDENLY TO TURN INTO A SKULL.
NONSENSE, THERE MUST BE A TRICK IN IT... AND I'M GOING TO FIND OUT WHAT IT IS!
LET ME HELP YOU. I FEEL BETTER NOW. I'D LIKE TO KNOW HOW THEY DID IT.
VERY WELL, PAUL. MEET ME HERE... AT MIDNIGHT!
SO... THAT NIGHT...
THAT'S THE BOOTH, MY FRIEND, BUT BE CAREFUL. WE DON'T WISH TO ALARM THOSE VILLAINS.

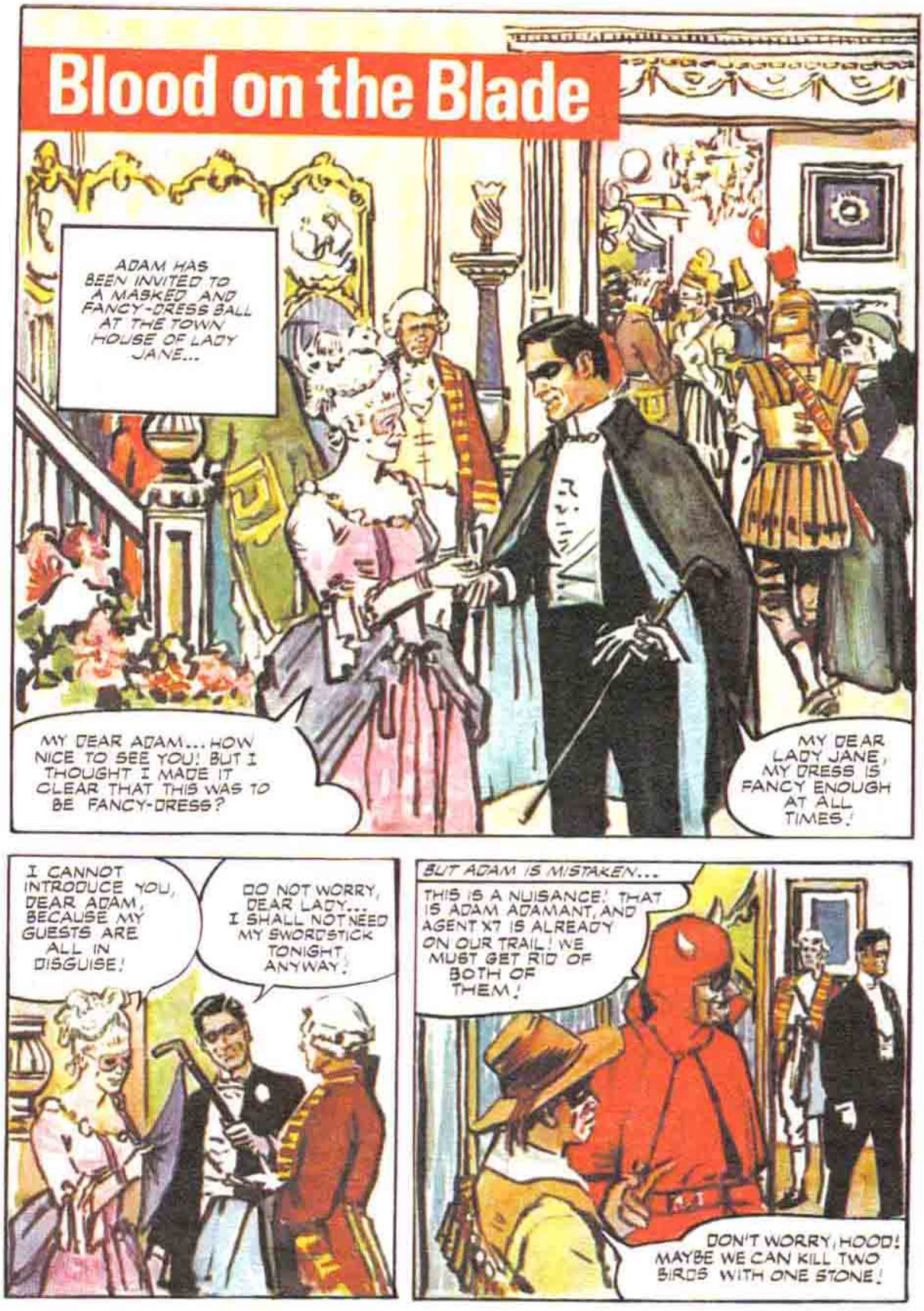
AH... I WAS RIGHT. YOU SEE, THAT FACE WAS ONLY A MASK. AND WHAT ARE THOSE THINGS ON THE TABLE?
JUST AS I THOUGHT... HE WAS WEARING AN ELECTRIC MASK, HE HAD ONLY TO PRESS THIS SWITCH AND IT FLASHED LIKE A SKULL. HM! WE'LL MAKE SOME ALTERATIONS!
BE QUICK SIR, SOMEBODY IS COMING!
SO IT'S YOU TWO AGAIN! I MIGHT HA' KNOWED IT! GO FOR 'EM, KO... GIVE 'EM THE RUBBER-MAN TREATMENT.
THAT'S IT, KO... THEY DIDN'T KNOW YOU WAS ALL RUBBER. GIVE 'EM ALL YOU'VE GOT!
I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN BY THAT STRANGE EXPRESSION, THE RUBBER-MAN TREATMENT, BUT I WARN YOU TO BE CAREFUL!

THIS WHAT YOU MEANT, BOSS?
THIS ONE WON'T WORRY US AGAIN, ANYWAY.
NOR WILL THIS ONE...
DUMP 'EM ON THE MOORS, KO. TEACH THEM A LESSON. FELLERS LIKE THAT COULD RUIN OUR WHOLE RACKET 'COS THEY KNOW YOU AIN'T REALLY A BOXER.
I'LL DO THAT, CHIEF.
WHERE ARE WE?
THE REAL POINT IS... HOW DID WE GET HERE?
THOSE TOUGHS IN THE BOXING BOOTH! THEY MUST HAVE BROUGHT US HERE! THEY'RE NOT GOING TO GET AWAY WITH THIS!
WHAT I WANT TO KNOW IS HOW WE'RE GOING TO GET HOME?

WE MUST BE DOING AT LEAST FOUR MILES AN HOUR.
DO NOT COMPLAIN, YOUNG MAN. THIS FARMER IS DOING US A GOOD TURN.
I FEEL BETTER NOW. THAT BATH HAS REVIVED ME.
THIS FOOD IS REVIVING ME, BUT I AGREE THAT WE MUST PAY THOSE CROOKS ANOTHER VISIT.
ROLL UP! ROLL UP! LLLURGH! I THOUGHT WE'D GOT RID OF YOU!
IT IS NOT SO EASY TO GET RID OF ME, MY FRIEND, AND THIS TIME I AM ACCEPTING YOUR CHALLENGE.
BE CAREFUL! THESE ROGUES HAVE OTHER TRICKS.
I HAVE ALREADY ARRANGED ANOTHER ONE MYSELF.
MAKE SURE OF HIM THIS TIME, KO, THAT GUY'S A NUISANCE.

THAT'S THE STUFF, GUV'NOR!
DO YOUR STUFF, YOU FOOL! SWITCH ON!
I'M TRYING TO GUV - YOU KNOW HOW RUBBERY A REAL PUNCH MAKES ME.
I HAVEN'T SEEN SUCH A STRAIGHT LEFT FOR YEARS.
HE IS CERTAINLY DOING HIS STUFF. THAT INDUCTION COIL I PUT IN HIS CIRCUIT LAST NIGHT IS GIVING HIM SHOCKS.
WHAT'S THE MATTER, YA TWIT. THIS AIN'T A DANCING LESSON.
I C-C-CAN'T HELP IT! I'M G-G-GETTING ELECTRIC SHOCKS.
YOW! HELP! YOU'RE GIVING ME SHOCKS AS WELL.
I'VE NEARLY DONE IT... I'VE GOT THE SWITCH AT LAST.


I ALWAYS FIGHT FAIR, MY MAN. SO... MAY WE CONTINUE NOW THAT YOU ARE SWITCHED OFF?
THAT'S THE STUFF SIR!
BEST FIGHT I'VE EVER SEEN!
FUNNIEST ONE I EVER SAW MYSELF!
LET THIS BE A LESSON TO YOU. CRIME DOES NOT PAY. EVERYONE KNOWS THAT YOU HAVE BEEN TRICKING THEM.
AS FOR THIS MONEY, IT IS REALLY YOURS, PAUL. HAVE A GOOD HOLIDAY, AND REMEMBER... THIS WORLD IS FULL OF TRICKSTERS...


Blood on the Blade
ADAM HAS BEEN INVITED TO A MASKED AND FANCY-DRESS BALL AT THE TOWN HOUSE OF LADY JANE...
MY DEAR ADAM... HOW NICE TO SEE YOU! BUT I THOUGHT I MADE IT CLEAR THAT THIS WAS TO BE FANCY-DRESS?
MY DEAR LADY JANE, MY DRESS IS FANCY ENOUGH AT ALL TIMES!
I CANNOT INTRODUCE YOU, DEAR ADAM, BECAUSE MY GUESTS ARE ALL IN DISGUISE!
DO NOT WORRY, DEAR LADY... I SHALL NOT NEED MY SWORDSTICK TONIGHT, ANYWAY!
BUT ADAM IS MISTAKEN...
THIS IS A NUISANCE! THAT IS ADAM ADAMANT, AND AGENT X7 IS ALREADY ON OUR TRAIL! WE MUST GET RID OF BOTH OF THEM!
DON'T WORRY, HOOD! MAYBE WE CAN KILL TWO BIRDS WITH ONE STONE!

SO... A HAND TAKES ADAM'S SWORDSTICK...
ADAM, MY GOOD FRIEND, I WOULD KNOW YOU ANYWHERE! ALLOW ME TO INTRODUCE MYSELF!
I'M AFRAID I DON'T KNOW YOU!
NO, YOU DON'T KNOW ME PERSONALLY, BUT YOU WILL REMEMBER MY GRANDFATHER'S JOKE! "UNEASY LIES THE CROWN WITHOUT A HEAD"!
UNEASY-LIES-THE-CROWN-WITHOUT... I SAY, THAT RINGS A BELL SOMEWHERE!
FOR ME, ADAM, THAT BELL HAS ALREADY TOLLED! I MUST AWAY TO MY DUTY!
UNEASY LIES THE CROWN WITHOUT A HEAD? BUT THAT IS ALL WRONG. IT SHOULD BE "UNEASY LIES THE HEAD THAT WEARS A CROWN". THIS IS MYSTERIOUS!

HERE WE ARE, GUV'NOR! WE'RE ALL SET FOR THE KILLING!
RIGHT, MIKE! WE'LL GET THEM BOTH!
OH!
MY FOOT!
THE LIGHTS HAVE GONE OUT!
THIS IS A TRAP!
WHEN THE LIGHTS GO UP...
HEAVENS! WHAT HAS HAPPENED?
CARRUTHERS! MY FRIEND! WHAT DID YOU MEAN...THE CROWN WITHOUT A HEAD..?
THE CROWN JEWELS ... IN THE TOWER... TOMORROW NIGHT... BUT... POLICE WILL NOT BELIEVE IT... IT IS SUPPOSED TO BE A TEST OF SECURITY ... AAAAAGH!
OH, ADAM, THIS IS TERRIBLE! I HAD TO CALL THE POLICE! WHO DID THIS DREADFUL THING?
CALM YOURSELF, MY DEAR! WE SHALL FIND THE MURDERER! THIS MAN WAS STABBED TO DEATH!

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, I MUST ASK YOU PLEASE TO REMOVE YOUR MASKS!
THIS IS THE MURDER WEAPON, INSPECTOR! IT SEEMS TO HAVE COME FROM AN OLD FASHIONED SWORDSTICK!
DO YOU KNOW THE OWNER?
IT IS MINE! BUT I ASSURE YOU I AM NOT THE KILLER! CARRUTHERS WAS MY FRIEND!
YOU CAN MAKE YOUR STATEMENT AT THE STATION, SIR! CARRUTHERS WAS AGENT X7!
STATION? NO, INSPECTOR! I HAVE WORK TO DO! THERE ARE THE JEWELS... STAND BACK!
TOMORROW NIGHT! THAT MEANS DAWN, BECAUSE THEY WILL NEED LIGHT! I MUST BE THERE...NOT IN A POLICE STATION!
BE CAREFUL, MISTER ADAMANT! THERE IS BLOOD ON THE BLADE! YOU MUST COME TO THE STATION!

I'VE LOCKED THAT DOOR! I AM SAFE FOR THE MOMENT! NOW TO FIND THE FIRE ESCAPE!

YES, AT DAWN TOMORROW! THAT MEANS THE DAY AFTER THIS, FOR IT IS ALREADY MORNING! I MUST FIND SOMEWHERE TO HIDE!

THIS WILL DO! A CELLAR IN A CONDEMNED BUILDING! SO... THIS EVENING I FIND MY WAY INTO THE TOWER ... AND HIDE AGAIN! NOT VERY PLEASANT, BUT IT MUST BE DONE!

SO...THAT EVENING...
I'M IN THE TOWER, ANYWAY! NOW TO FIND A HIDING PLACE!

EARLY NEXT MORNING...
HERE THEY ARE! ALL CROOKS! BUT THEY ARE WELL DISGUISED! AND WHEN THE ALARM BELLS RING... IF THEY DO! ...THE MESSAGE WILL BE IGNORED! WHAT A CUNNING PLAN!

THE GANSTERS SET ABOUT THEIR TASK...
GOOD, STARKEY, THAT WILL SETTLE THAT LOT FOR A FEW HOURS!
THAT'S THE STUFF STARKEY! WE'LL BURN THROUGH THE WIRE MESH ROUND THE JEWELS INSIDE ONCE WE'VE BURNED THROUGH THIS LOCK!
THE ALARM GOES OFF AT SCOTLAND YARD...
ALL CORRECT, SIR! TESTING THE ALARM!
O. K. OFFICER, ALARM HAS SOUNDED! ALL CORRECT!
KEEP AT IT STARKEY! IN A FEW MOMENTS, ALL THESE JEWELS WILL BE OURS!
BUT THE HOOD HAS FORGOTTEN ADAM...
THE BEST PLAN IS TO STARTLE THEM! AND THIS BAG OF POWDER IS JUST RIGHT FOR ONE OF THOSE OLD GUNS!

FIRE!
!!
AH! THAT BANG HAS BROUGHT THEM RUNNING! NOW TO PUT AN END TO THEIR TRICKS!
THE CROOKS POUR OUT OF THE JEWEL HOUSE...
SO... YOU MEAN TO BE NASTY! WE'LL SOON SETTLE THAT!
THAT FOR YOU, OLD CHAP! YOU DIDN'T EXPECT THIS, DID YOU!

SORRY TO STUN YOU, OLD BOY, BUT YOU ASKED FOR IT! NOW FOR THE OTHERS!
AH! THE REAL VILLAIN AT LAST!
I'LL HAVE THAT BAUBLE, OLD CHAP! YOU HAVE NO RIGHT TO IT, YOU KNOW!
LATER...
YES, INSPECTOR, I KNOW THE BANG ALARMED YOU, BUT THE ALARM HAD REALLY SOUNDED EARLIER! ONLY YOU THOUGHT IT WAS SIMPLY A TEST OF THE SECURITY ARRANGMENTS! WHAT A CUNNING SCHEME!
YOU HAD BEEN INFORMED THAT IT IT WAS MERELY A TEST AND SO IT WAS! IF I HAD NOT BEEN HERE THEY WOULD HAVE GOT AWAY WITH IT! I TRUST, NOW, THAT YOU DO NOT THINK I HAD ANYTHING TO DO WITH THE MURDER OF MY FRIEND, CARRUTHERS?
NO, SIR! WE HAVE THE PROOF NOW! YOUR FINGER-PRINTS ON THE SWORDSTICK WERE COVERED OVER BY SOMEBODY ELSE'S, AND WE HAVE NO DOUBT NOW WHO THAT PERSON WAS! MY THANKS TO YOU, SIR...

Train to NOWHERE

Adam was dreaming. He dreamed he was a boy again. On the carpet in the sitting-room of his dream he was playing with his toy steam engine. There was the smell of methylated spirit in his nostrils. There was the hissing of steam in his ears. Above all, there was the shriek of the whistle as the train entered a dark tunnel.

It was at this point that Adam started into wakefulness. But he was still in the dark.

Adam had been dozing in the corner seat of a cushioned compartment in a real train!

There was no doubt about that, because he was fully awake now with the smell of smoke and steam around him. Adam seized the strap of the window above the door to close it, but, at that moment, he was thrown almost on to his face.

Fortunately, he landed on the cushions of the seat opposite, so he was not hurt. But the brakes had obviously been applied with alarming suddenness. Adam scrambled to his feet, wondering what was happening.

In a few seconds the train came to a grinding

halt. It was a corridor train, and Adam turned swiftly from the window to the corridor side. Footsteps were approaching.

Adam was expecting the guard, or some official who would tell him why the train had stopped so suddenly in the tunnel. But the face that appeared in the corridor doorway was unlike anything he had been expecting.

It was red and whiskery, and its nose was exceptionally long.

"A mask!" Adam gasped to himself. "What on earth——"

But he had no time to finish. For the figure in the mask was pointing a wicked-looking gun at him and speaking in a dead-pan voice.

"Get up," it said. "Raise your hands, and don't give any trouble. This gun is loaded."

Adam pulled himself together.

"Most gracious of you," he replied with sarcasm. "Would you mind telling me the reason for all this?"

"If you don't ask questions, you'll be told no lies," growled the masked gunman. "Come on out an' walk ahead of me along the corridor."

He stood back as he spoke, making it difficult for Adam to use his swordstick, so Adam shrugged and did as he was told. He was forced at the point of the gun to walk the whole length of the train and join a group of frightened passengers who had been collected in the forward dining car. Other masked men were threatening them with guns, and Adam gazed carelessly around at the strange masks as he entered. There were red faces, red noses, short noses and long noses.

"Quite a carnival group," Adam said cheerfully. "Is this some rehearsal for a new play?"

A young man—one of the passengers—holding the arm of his girl friend, did not take kindly to Adam's joking.

"Be careful, sir! These men are villains. This is some plot to rob the train."

"Quiet, there!" growled one of the masked men. "Get out and walk."

Adam's sense of humour went cold. All the time he had been suspecting some plot or other, and now he was certain that this was no laughing matter.

"Where are you taking us?" he asked quietly, as one of the masked men prodded him with his gun out into the tunnel with the rest of the passengers. "You know you will not get away with this."

"Don't be too sure, guv'nor." The masked man sniggered. "We know this railway line. It's going to be closed shortly, and there's an abandoned station a little way back. You ought to be pleased about it, because it means we can get rid of you in comfort."

The meaning of these words became clear about ten minutes later. The passengers were herded back in the darkness of the tunnel by the masked figures with torches, and the deserted station became their prison. In a cold, gloomy waiting-room, grey in the fading light of day, they were bound roughly with cords and pushed down on to the floor. There were no chairs or benches. The masked men emptied their pockets, then gave a last look round and departed, slamming the door behind them.

"Perfect gentlemen, of course," said Adam to the boy and girl beside him. "I wonder what they would have done had the train been crowded with people?"

"They knew it wouldn't be," snorted the young man. "On this line, there are hardly any passengers at this time of day. That's why it is being closed down."

Adam remembered suddenly what his destination should have been. It should have been the next station beyond the tunnel, a small halt known as Fairley. He had been travelling on this small local line in order to visit an old friend of his, a Colonel Johnson, and the memory reminded him that, at this time of the year, there was usually a fairground close by.

"So that's where those crooks got their masks from," he said aloud.

"Yes, sir," snorted the young man. "And I happen to know that in the guard's van there's a fortune in old notes. It's quite clear what that gang is after."

"How do you know that?" Adam asked swiftly. "Who are you, and what is your name?"

"My name is Carter, George Carter, and I work for British Railways. But this is my day off, and I was taking this young lady, Mary Martin, for an evening at the fair."

His tone was so honest that Adam decided to accept his statement as a truthful one.

"Very well, George," he said, "we must work together. Perhaps you will begin by getting your bound feet under me and giving me a violent lift."

* * *

George looked bewildered. It seemed to him that Adam was asking for a violent kick in the rear. The few other passengers around them, who had been bemoaning their fate, were equally astounded.

"Do you mind repeating that, sir?" George asked.

Adam repeated his request.

"And don't think I am mad," he added, smiling. "Because all those villains don't seem to have realised that a bound man can hop."

Adam demonstrated this fact a few moments later. When George, using his feet, had enabled Adam to get to his own feet, Adam hopped rapidly to the door that the crooks had merely slammed. Here, he bent down and used his teeth on the door handle. This was a 'push-down' handle, and Adam soon had the door open wide.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said then, "I will be back shortly. Those villains are quite clever, but not clever enough. They have robbed us of everything we might use as weapons, but have forgotten there are all sorts of things lying around an abandoned station."

He proved his words in less than a quarter of an hour. Hopping along the platform, he came presently to what he wanted, which was the rough edge of an iron railing, something so worn that it served the purpose of a dull knife. By rubbing the cords of his bound hands behind him on this edge he soon frayed them sufficiently to break them. After that it was a simple matter for him to untie his bound feet. Thoughtfully, Adam placed the frayed cords in his pocket for evidence.

His re-appearance in the waiting-room was greeted with cheers.

"My goodness!" exclaimed an elderly gentleman. "How did you do it, sir?"

"Partly, sir," said Adam politely, "by imitating the movement of a kangaroo. Partly, also, by using the brain of a human being. Allow me to remove your bonds."

There was some stretching and snorting when Adam had released the passengers, George

Carter seized Adam's hand and shook it warmly.

"Now for the police!" George cried. "They're the chaps to deal with this gang."

"Too late, I'm afraid," Adam responded. "All phones and telegraphs have been disconnected. And by now those chaps will be humping the mail bags out of the tunnel on to some lorry. No, George, we must finish this job ourselves."

"Ourselves, sir?"

"Yes, indeed. If the ladies and old people will make their way to the road, you and I will return to the tunnel. We have still time."

"But—but surely we must report this outrage?" exclaimed the old gentleman who had spoken before. "We must inform the police!"

"By all means, sir. Inform them as soon as you find means to do so. All I am saying is that George and I have no time to waste. By the way, George," Adam added, smiling, "you are at liberty to go with the others if you wish. I am quite capable of doing this job on my own."

George swallowed hard.

"No, sir. As long as Mary is safe, I'm coming with you."

"Come on, then, George. We're wasting time."

George hesitated. He turned to Mary.

"Will you be all right, Mary?"

"Of course I will. I shall be with all these others. But I want to come with you."

"Don't be silly." George was very firm. "We may be going into danger."

"But I still want to come."

George settled the argument by pushing Mary along with two women who were with the elderly gentleman.

"I'm ready, Adam," he said.

Carefully George and Adam climbed down from the platform on to the rails that led into the

tunnel. They were ordinary steam rails, without current, and Adam strode swiftly ahead into the darkness, with George close behind him.

"What is the plan, sir?" George whispered, as they left the lighter darkness of night for the black hole of the tunnel.

"First," Adam replied, "to find the compartment in which I was seated when that gunman came in. I had placed my swordstick under the seat, and he did not think to look there. So I did not draw attention to the fact. When I am armed again, those villains will get a surprise."

George smiled to himself in the darkness. He liked the idea of the crooks receiving a surprise. He had been shaken by the startling events of the night, and felt he had not yet really played a man's part.

But it was George himself who received the surprise. Soft footsteps sounded suddenly behind him, and George swung round in alarm.

"Look out, sir!" he cried. "Somebody's coming."

Adam had already flattened himself against the brickwork of the tunnel. Although unarmed, he was ready to tackle anything that came. What came was a faint scream in a girlish voice and a loud and horrified gasp from George.

"M-Mary! What—what . . . are you doing?"

"D-d-doing what I said I would!" gasped the girl, almost choking. "I said I was coming with you. And, George . . . you've nearly choked me."

Poor George was full of apologies. He had thought he was dealing with one of the crooks! But Adam was annoyed, although he was quite capable of re-arranging his plans.

"Very well, young lady!" he snapped. "Since you have followed us, please keep behind George, and George . . . you keep behind me."

* * *

Adam groped his way forward. He could see the rear light of the train now, which the crooks had failed to extinguish, possibly to give themselves light for their work. But they also had torches, and these could be seen flashing as men climbed in and out of the guard's van.

Adam had been following the right-hand track, always a good plan when walking, but now he crossed over to the left-hand track, knowing that the men would be using the other side, so that they had more room for handling the mailbags. Quietly he felt for George, who was close behind him, and the trio went on forward hand-in-hand, but following in single file.

"My compartment was somewhere about the middle," Adam whispered.

As they worked their way along the narrow space between the coaches and the tunnel wall, Adam could see vaguely what the men with their torches were doing. They were carrying the mailbags forward from the guard's van to some spot about the middle of the train where they dumped them on the vacant track.

Adam was puzzled. How could they load those bags on to the getaway lorry right in the middle of the tunnel?

He gave up worrying about it and led his companions to the spot where he reckoned his compartment was situated. Sure enough, his sense of proportion was accurate, for, as he climbed carefully onto the footboard, hidden from the view of the crooks on the other side, he was able to see his swordstick on the floor under the seat as he swung open the door. There was only just room for the door to open against the brickwork of the tunnel.

Adam and his companions crawled cautiously into the compartment. The flashing lights of the torches gave them all the light they needed. But they were still hidden from view of the men on the vacant track.

"Ah!" said Adam, as he seized his faithful stick. "Now we are armed again. And 'thrice

armed is he who gets his prop in first'."

"I have heard that quotation, sir," George whispered. "Does it come from Shakespeare?"

"Who cares?" Adam snapped. "Make the young lady keep down on the floor. I want to see what is happening to those mailbags."

Adam saw what he was looking for as he crawled and raised himself slowly so that he could look out of the window on the opposite side. It was a cunning scheme, dependent entirely on the fact that this was an old tunnel built solely for steam traction.

In all such tunnels there are air shafts to the surface of the ground above, shafts which carry away smoke and fumes from the engine. How often these shafts occur in a tunnel of any particular length Adam did not know, but his schoolboy enthusiasm for steam engines had provided him with the knowledge that they existed.

Below the shaft the crooks were stacking the mailbags, and down the shaft there was a rope with a hook on the end of it. One at a time the bags were being fastened to the hook and hauled away by somebody above. So the whole robbery was being conducted in secret in the tunnel, while those above were probably in a field somewhere not far from the road where their lorry was parked.

"Cunning!" Adam muttered. "A lot of thought and organisation. I wonder if there is still any current in those wires along the brickwork?"

Adam was thinking of the wall close to the train, not the one where the crooks were working. Softly Adam withdrew the sheath from his swordstick, and, whispering to George and Mary to keep down, he crawled back to the side of the train that he had entered.

For the next few moments Adam was busy with his swordstick. He was sawing through the insulation of the electric light wires that ran in loops along the side of the tunnel. The handle of his sword, as he well knew, also was insulated, and presently he had the satisfaction of seeing the result.

This was startling. Showers of sparks and flashes poured from the electric wires as he crossed them with the steel of his blade. It was as though fireworks had been emptied suddenly into the comparative darkness of the tunnel. Loud shouts came from the crooks, and one of

them stumbled and dropped the bag he was carrying.

"What the heck's going on?" shouted a voice.

Adam smiled grimly to himself. It seemed as though his plan was working. For a moment longer he held the blade so that the short circuit was continued, then he whipped it away and crawled back into the compartment with his companions.

"Are you mad, sir?" George gasped. "You have let them know plainly that somebody is here."

"Of course," said Adam. "That is what I intended. There will be no more mailbags sent aloft until they find out who it is. I have stopped their game for a moment and given us a little more time. Also, I think I have sent them off on a wild-goose chase."

Adam was right. The tunnel went dark as the crooks switched off their torches, and the darkness was followed by a grim silence. Somebody had given the order to keep quiet and search the train.

"Now!" said Adam swiftly. "Grab those bags that are stacked under the shaft and throw them back into the train."

George was quick to understand Adam's intention. In the pitch darkness, he tumbled out of the compartment behind Adam and worked like a Trojan to help throw the bags back into the train. There were not more than a dozen stacked under the shaft, and, although they had to feel for them in the blackness, they had got them all in before they even paused to take breath.

"What now, sir?" George panted, gripping Adam's arm. "What about those they have already sent up the shaft?"

"That is what I am going to find out," said Adam calmly. "Perhaps you will help to hook me on to that hauling line?"

George's grip became like a vice.

"You . . . you are not really going to let them haul you up, sir?"

"Why not?" said Adam calmly. "They will not be expecting me. And there are quite a number of bags to be accounted for."

George could hardly believe his ears. Dazedly

he held Adam's arm as Adam groped his way back to the hook that was dangling below the shaft. A voice somewhere above was calling down coarsely to know what had happened.

Adam made no reply. Instead, he seized the rope and swarmed up it for a few feet. Then, placing his foot in the hook, he whispered to George.

"Jerk on that line beside me, George, then get back into the train and you and Mary get under the seat. It's the signal line, I mean . . . I saw that was what they were using."

Unhappily, for he feared for Adam's safety, George felt for the thin cord beside the hauling rope that the crooks had been using to signal to their companions above. Almost immediately Adam felt himself rising through the smoke shaft, and he held on grimly as he waited for some sight of starlight above.

* * *

The starlight was a long time in coming. For one thing, the shaft was not truly vertical all the way up. There was a moment when Adam found himself being dragged up sloping brickwork. Presently, however, the shaft was vertical again, and he was then spinning on the end of the dangling rope.

All of a sudden, Adam realised why he could not see the light of the stars. These air or smoke-shafts from the old steam tunnels were always bricked in round the top. This was to prevent unwary walkers from falling down into the tunnel. The brickwork was like a "cap", with small holes in the walls to let out the smoke.

This realisation prepared Adam for what he was to find above. One of the "smoke-holes" in the brickwork had been enlarged by the crooks so that they could drag the mailbags through it. They had a pulley slung from the roof and were hauling the rope over this.

Two men were standing on the grass outside the enlarged hole and hauling up the weights. They were also complaining about the heavy load that their companions seemed to have hooked on for this journey! Adam smiled grimly to himself as he heard their remarks.

"What the heck's the boss thinking about?" one man growled. "He must ha' put half-a-dozen bags on this time."

"He wants to get the job over," growled the other, then started back in horror as Adam's face appeared at the hole in the brickwork.

Adam had given many people shocks in his

time. His whole life was a shock to some people. But what he gave the two crooks, when they found him leaping at them from the aperture, took a lot of beating.

Adam saw that there was no need to use his swordstick. On the contrary, the crooks were so startled by his appearance that he performed a trick that completely defeated them. Diving through the enlarged hole in the circular wall of bricks, he grabbed each man by the neck and banged their heads together. There was a dull thud, similar to wood meeting wood, then the two labourers of the gang subsided gently on to the ground, out to the world.

The mailbags they had already hauled up were stacked on the ground beside them. A little way away, on a lonely road, was the lorry in which they had been intending to load them. The lorry was without lights, and the road was only a few yards from the grassy knoll where the tunnel-shaft emerged.

But Adam changed all their intentions. Rapidly he seized one bag after another and tossed them down the shaft. They fell and slid with their own weight back to the tunnel. Adam smiled to himself as he wondered whether any of the crooks below were standing under the shaft, but he was satisfied that George would have returned to the train as instructed. So George and Mary would not be suffering.

In a short time Adam had sent all the bags back again. Then, scrambling back through the aperture, he grabbed both the hauling end of the rope over the pulley and also the part that was attached to the hook. Carefully he lowered himself back into the darkness. His job was not by any means finished yet. There was a whole gang below that had to be dealt with first.

The men below had been playing safe. Not daring to switch on their torches, they had been creeping along beside the train on each side. As Adam descended suddenly in the pitch darkness, he made a slight noise, and the crooks halted to find out what was the cause of it.

Adam leapt for the compartment in which he knew that George and Mary had hidden themselves. As soon as he leapt in, there were gasps from both sides.

"Take it easy," Adam whispered. "Tis only I! Now we've got to move fast."

Finding the hands of the two young people in the dark, Adam hurried them out of the compartment on to the vacant track alongside.

"Throw in all these bags, George," he whispered. "We must get this train moving before those villains realise what is happening."

To Adam's amazement, the girl Mary was beside him, helping to throw in the bags. In Adam's day, ladies had not been so energetic! With Mary's help, the bags at the bottom of the vent shaft were all on board in a matter of seconds, and Adam was just preparing to follow them when a startling figure appeared.

Even Adam was startled. The figure was that of a skeleton . . . and the skeleton was walking! A mass of bones, without any covering, it came towards them through the dark tunnel. For a brief second Adam wondered whether he was dreaming.

Then Mary screamed. The girl was frightened out of her wits. Her scream echoed and re-echoed along the tunnel, and there were hoarse shouts from every man in the gang.

"There they are! We've got them!"

Adam reacted with surprising speed. Grabbing the screaming girl, he pushed her back into the train. Then he seized George by the arm and helped him ruthlessly on board. After that, Adam himself swarmed into the compartment, slamming the door behind him. At the sound of the slam, torches flashed on and the same voice shouted further orders.

"It's only some of the passengers! They're on board again! Get on board and find them . . . we're not going to be beaten now!"

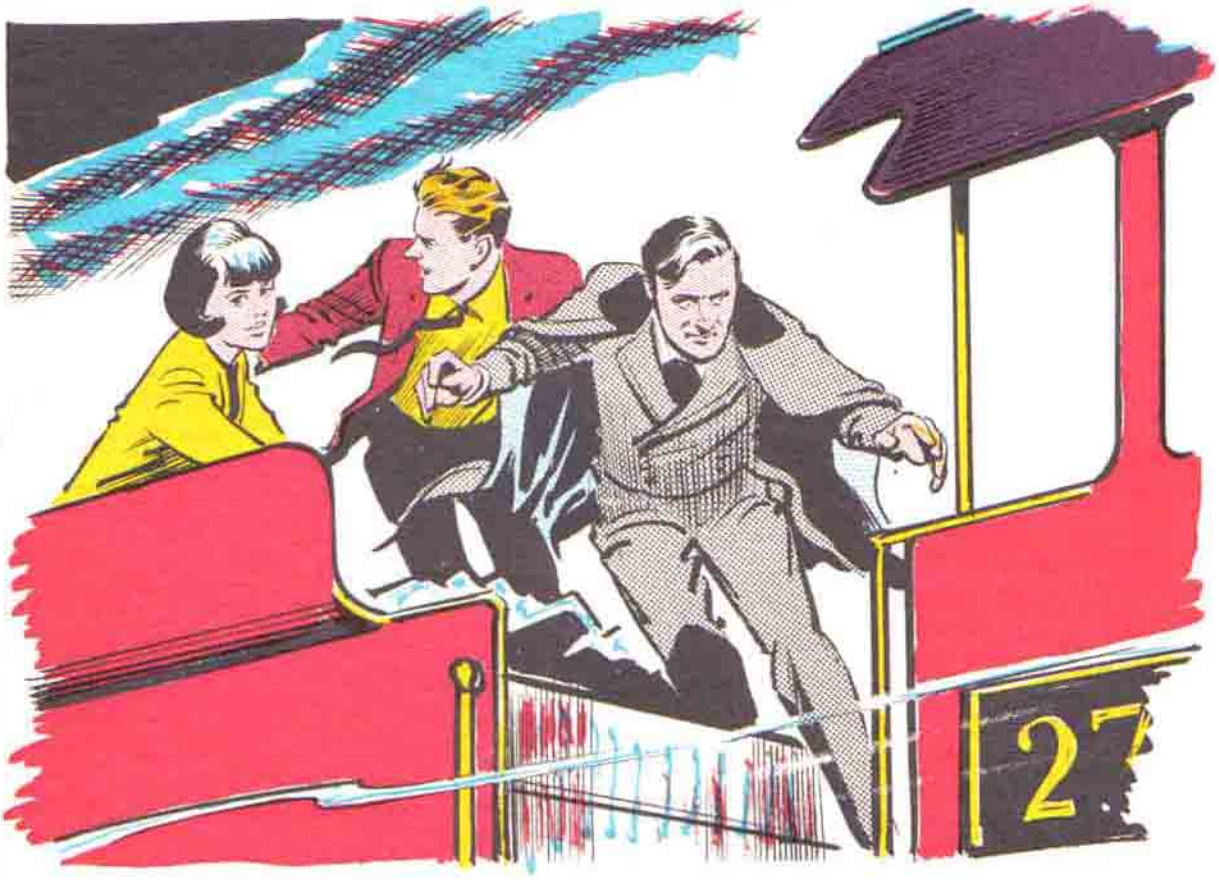
* * *

Adam did not hesitate. If the crooks were going to board the train, the result would be a foregone conclusion. He could not fight a whole gang.

No! but he could do something else! His wits working fast, he hurried George and Mary forward along the corridor.

"Make for the engine!" he cried. "We must get this thing out of the tunnel."

George and Mary grasped the idea instantly. If only they could get out into the open, the



situation might be different. They followed Adam, hand-behind-hand until they came to the foremost coach. Here they had to burst open a door and climb over the old-fashioned tender, which was full of coal.

They almost stumbled over two bound figures. These were the figures of the driver and fireman. They had been coshed and bound by the crooks in the beginning. They were still unconscious, and Adam gave them only a brief glance as he slid down over the coal to the footplate of the locomotive.

Now Adam's early love of steam engines came to his aid. Striking a match, he saw by the gauge that there was enough steam to get the locomotive moving. He seized the throttle, a long lever with a handle, and pulled it down for a start. Almost instantly, there was a loud chuff from the engine, after which the pistons thrust at the connecting rods and started to turn the driving wheels.

Frantic shouts came from the crooks behind him! They felt the train moving, and did not wish to be left in the tunnel. What was worse, all the mailbags were on board, and a fortune in notes was steaming away from them!

As the train gathered speed, there were more shouts and directions from the leader, but his voice was almost drowned in the loud bursts of steam. Adam was happy on the footplate, driving a real locomotive instead of the toy one he had been remembering in his dream.

The tunnel echoed to the clang of the wheels on the rails. The clickety-clack as the wheels passed over the joints was music in Adam's ears. He turned to George and roared his orders.

"Stoke, man!" he yelled. "Raise a full head of steam. It's the only way we can defeat those villains."

George seized a shovel. He was not used to stoking, but he could see how to throw coal into the glowing firebox. With the red glow around them, Adam, George and Mary looked like avengers from some nether world.

But the crooks were quick to understand

their danger. They had scrambled through the rocking corridor until they reached the tender, at which point their leader drew a gun.

"Stop that engine!" he roared. "Stop it or I'll shoot!"

Adam pushed Mary down on to the footplate.

"Drop that shovel, George!" he shouted. "Get down here where they can't hit us!"

The gun blared almost as he was speaking. But George had dropped both the shovel and himself even before Adam had finished shouting. Six times the revolver fired, and each bullet whizzed over the heads of the trio on the footplate.

They found their mark, however, among the gauges and levers. Steam began to spurt from the bullet holes. The bullets had penetrated the boiler above the firebox. Adam and his companions lay quiet.

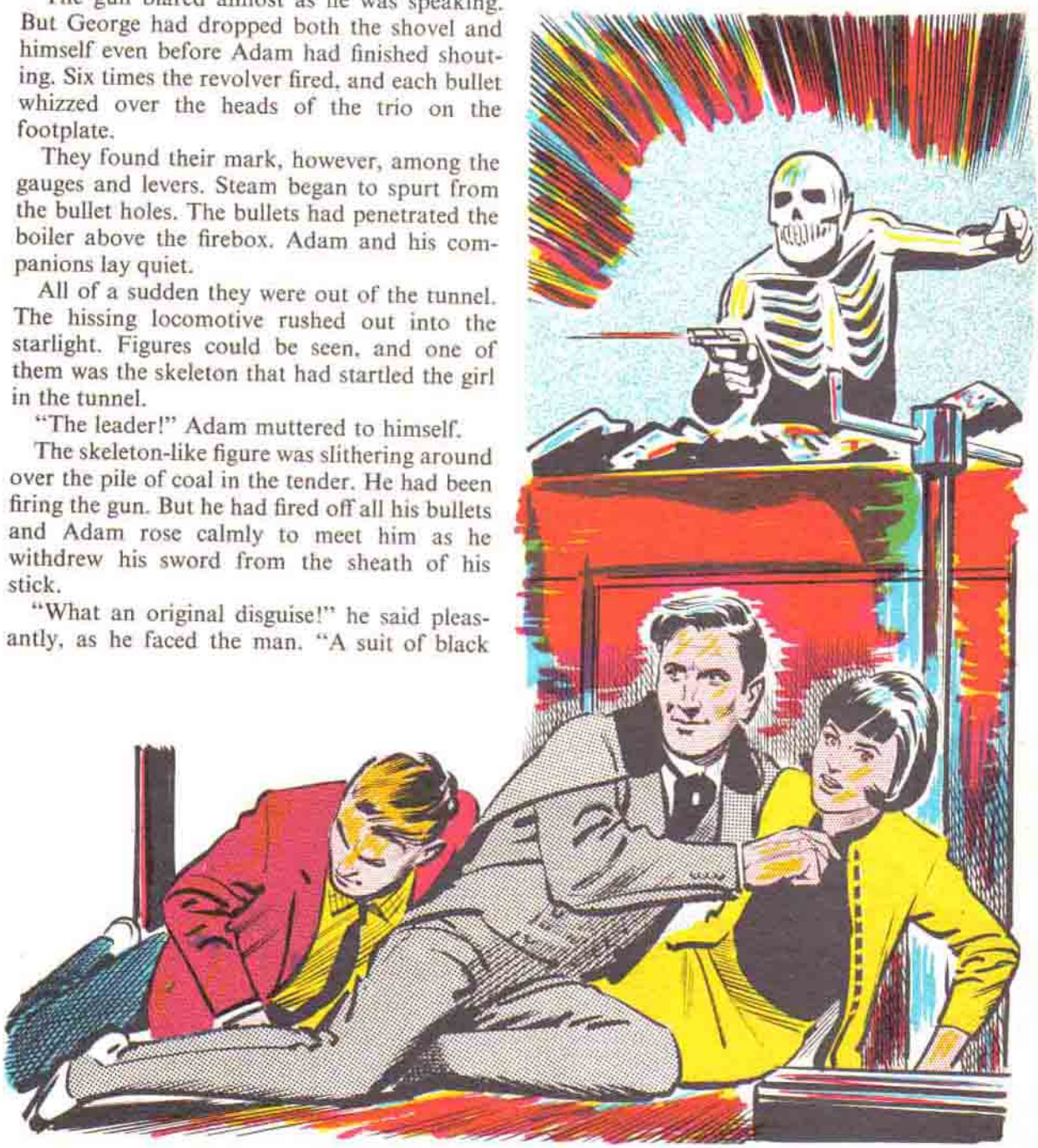
All of a sudden they were out of the tunnel. The hissing locomotive rushed out into the starlight. Figures could be seen, and one of them was the skeleton that had startled the girl in the tunnel.

"The leader!" Adam muttered to himself.

The skeleton-like figure was slithering around over the pile of coal in the tender. He had been firing the gun. But he had fired off all his bullets and Adam rose calmly to meet him as he withdrew his sword from the sheath of his stick.

"What an original disguise!" he said pleasantly, as he faced the man. "A suit of black tights with the bones of a skeleton painted on it in luminous paint. Tell me, old chap, did you think of it yourself, or did you find it in that fairground?"

The leader snarled an uncouth reply. Then, hurling a lump of coal at Adam, he leaped as Adam ducked to avoid it. Adam's sword



clattered to the footplate as the skeleton-figure grappled with him.

George tried to come to Adam's rescue. He rose from a crouching position—and was almost thrown overboard as the rolling locomotive jerked round a bend. It was taking the bend at far too great a speed. Adam and the leader swayed and fell to the footplate at the same instant.

They struggled for a while on the slippery steel. Then, using a judo trick, Adam managed to gain the upper hand. He was on top of his antagonist as the train swerved again.

This was almost Adam's undoing. The jerk threw him under the skeleton figure, and the latter got his hands on Adam's throat.

"Curse you!" he snarled. "Curse you, you interfering busybody! This time I will . . . AAAAAAGH!"

That last remark was the result of Adam using his knees. He brought them up with a jerk that completely disorganised his antagonist. The skeleton-clad figure flew over his head—and flew on beyond the footplate into outer darkness!

Adam rose slowly from his position on the footplate.

"Unfortunate!" he murmured. "I did not mean to throw him overboard. Let's hope he has landed in something soft."

"The others are coming, sir," said George, who was a trifle shaken. "They are climbing down over the coal now."

"Ah!" said Adam. "So we have more to deal with!"

The answer he received from the criminals was the last one that he had expected. Adam had seized his sword and was prepared to defend himself and his charges to the last. But the crooks were shaking with terror.

"Shut off steam!" they shouted. "Stop the train! There is a block on the rails ahead!"

Adam turned swiftly and stared through the spectacle glass ahead. Sure enough, in the starlight, he could see the blockage. The gang had laid concrete blocks on the line in case they had

not been able to stop the train as planned in the tunnel.

"Shut off steam, sir!" they yelled again.

Adam seized the handle of the throttle. He tried to push it up, but it would not move. A bullet from the gun of the leader had jammed it in position!

The train roared on. With George's stoking it had raised a full head of steam, and now it was out of control. Rocking and rolling, it headed at a good forty miles an hour towards the concrete blocks that the crooks had lain on the line ahead.

Adam came to a swift decision. Whatever the risk, he must make sure that George and Mary were not involved in the crash that was bound to come.

"Jump, George!" he shouted hoarsely. "There's a grassy bank beside us. Jump into the longest grass you can find."

George looked bewildered.

"What about Mary, sir?"

"I'll look after Mary. She must jump with us. But she'll jump with something soft to land on. Me!" Adam added, as he seized the girl in his arms.

What happened next was too swift for the eye to follow. George jumped, followed by Adam, who held the girl in his arms.

As far as Adam was concerned, the next few moments seemed like the dream with which this adventure had begun. He was aware of flying through space, then rolling over and over as he landed on the long grass beside the track.

* * *

He could not remember afterwards how many times he turned somersaults, but still he held firmly to Mary.

At length the spinning sensation ceased, and Adam found himself lying on the hardcore beside the track. This was all stone, but he had rolled on to it from the grassy embankment, and was without any broken bones. Mary lay beside him, wondering what had happened.

"Are you all right?" she gasped.

"Yes, I'm feeling fine," Adam responded cheerfully. "I hope George is the same."

George appeared a moment later. He almost fell on top of them, for he, also, had rolled down the grassy bank. But, before he could speak, there was a thunderous roar like that of a tall building collapsing. It was almost like a bomb going off. The train had gone on and thundered into the blockage on the line, the engine and coaches leaping and twisting as they crunched into one another in the crash.

The night was then lurid with flames. Burning coal from the engine was scattered all over the track, steam thrust it in all directions, and the coaches rolled over and over and climbed on top of one another in the general confusion.

Adam rose once again to his feet. His cloak flowed out behind him, his hair was wild in the wind. But he knew that he had saved millions of pounds from going to the crooks who had planned this robbery.

"My dear," he said, as he helped Mary to rise, "you and your friend have helped me

greatly this night. I am sorry that your holiday has been so disastrous."

Adam's speech was cut short by the flashing of headlights from a bridge ahead. The police, alerted by the passengers who had crossed the fields, had arrived at last. They came swarming down the embankment, followed by nurses and doctors when the crash had been signalled.

* * *

Some of the crooks were found alive. It was their own fault that the train had crashed into the barricade they had built themselves. Adam was content as he saw the coaches go up in flames.

"After all," he said, "those notes were really due for burning. And this line and its rolling stock were due to be closed down. I trust that you and Mary, George, will still be able to spend a happy weekend."

"Your trust does you credit, sir," said George, who was somewhat bruised. "We have had an exciting time. And, as we don't usually find much excitement, a change is always as good as a rest."

Adam smiled as he strolled away from the scene. Once again he had prevented villainy. And that, to Adam, after his long life, was as good as a rest indeed.

* * *

CARAVAN OF TERROR
IN THE TRIBAL TERRITORY OF THE KHYBER PASS, WHERE THE PATHANS LIVE MAINLY BY THE LAW OF THE GUN, A MAN IS RUNNING FOR HIS LIFE ACROSS A NULLAH, OR A DRY WATERCOURSE, WHILE BULLETS FLY ALL ROUND HIM FROM SNIPERS AMONG THE ROCKS...

AAAAAGH!
HE IS HIT, BUT WE MUST MAKE SURE OF HIM! HE IS A GOVERNMENT AGENT AND KNOWS OUR PLANS! ALI AND SHARIF...FINISH HIM WITH YOUR KNIVES!
WE OBEY, GHULAM GI! WE WILL MAKE SURE OF HIM!
BUT ALI IS MISTAKEN, FOR A REMARKABLE FIGURE LEAPS SUDDENLY INTO VIEW.
NOT SO FAST, MY FRIENDS! THE BATTLE IS NOT YET OVER!
THIS WILL BE EASY! HE HAS NOT FIRED A SHOT!

GO BACK WHERE YOU BELONG, FOR I DO NOT WISH TO KILL YOU!

AH! YOU WOULD, WOULD YOU?

THEN WE MUST TAKE STRONGER MEASURES! YOU WILL RUN NOW; OR YOUR FEET WILL BE KILLING YOU!

SPEAK, SHERDIL, TELL ME YOUR NEWS! THE WHOLE FRONTIER FORCE IS BEHIND US, BUT I GOT HERE FIRST!
SORRY, COLONEL SAHIB, I AM—DYING! IT IS GHULAM MOHAMMED! HE PLANS... TO RULE... THE WORLD! HIS... PLAN... IS TO... AAAAGH!

DEAD... BEFORE HE COULD TELL ME THE PLOT. I MUST INFORM THE FRONTIER FORCE!
IT IS A LIGHT, CAPTAIN SAHIB! SOMEONE IS SIGNALLING FROM THE NULLAH!
IT IS OUR FRIEND, THE ENGLISHMAN! SHERDIL IS DEAD... AND HE WAS THE LAST OF OUR AGENTS WHO COULD SPEAK PUSHTU!
GET THOSE GUNS IN POSITION! SHELL THOSE PATHANS! WE MUST SAVE THE ENGLISHMAN FROM HIS OWN FOOLISHNESS!
WHAT IS THIS? THE ENGLISHMAN IS TAKING SHERDIL'S PLACE! HE MUST NOT DO IT! HE IS OUR GUEST, AND WE ARE HERE TO PROTECT HIM!
FIRE!

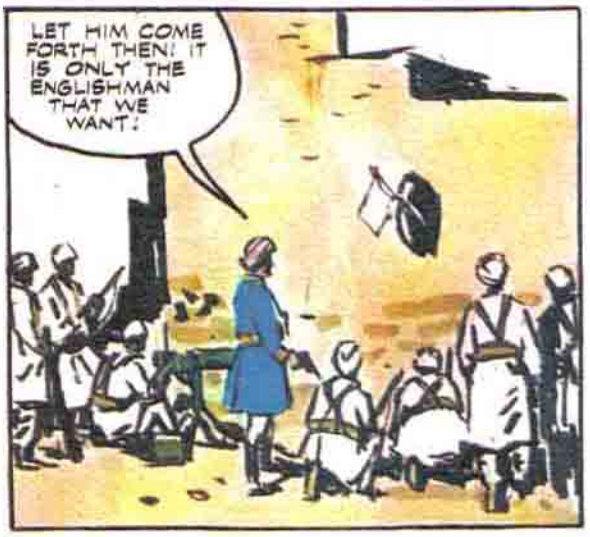
THE GUNS BLARE OUT THEIR MESSAGE OF DEATH, AND GHULAM MOHAMMED IS FORCED TO RETREAT. BUT HE IS FURIOUS WITH ALI AND SHARIF...
DOGS AND SONS OF DOGS! YOU RAN FROM ONE MAN! STAKE THEM OUT AND LEAVE THEM FOR THE JACKALS!
LET ALL DOGS LEARN! BY THIS I SHOW THAT I AM THE TRUE RULER OF THE WORLD! WHEN THE CARAVAN COMES DOWN FROM THE NORTH YOU SHALL SEE!
BUT ADAM IS UNCONCERNED WITH THE BATTLE RAGING OVER HIS HEAD. HE HAS HIS OWN JOB TO DO...
THIS IS THE ONLY WAY! I MUST FOLLOW GHULAM MOHAMMED! THAT VILLAIN IS PLANNING SOMETHING THAT WILL SHAKE THE WORLD!
FAREWELL, MY LION-HEARTED SHERDIL! NO VULTURES WILL GET YOU UNDER THOSE STONES! YOUR BRAVE WORK WILL NOT BE IN VAIN! YOU HAVE GIVEN ME THE NAME OF GHULAM MOHAMMED, AND I WILL CONTINUE WHERE YOU LEFT OFF!
WHAT I NEED HERE IS THE SKILL OF A MOUNTAIN GOAT!
SO ADAM FOLLOWS GHULAM AND THE PATHANS INTO THE HILLS...

THAT WAS A CLOSE ONE! THOSE FRONTIER CHAPS KNOW HOW TO SHOOT, ALTHOUGH THEY ARRIVED TOO LATE!
WELL, I'M ON THE RIGHT TRACK, ANYWAY! MORE OF GHULAM'S DIRTY WORK! I DON'T KNOW HOW HE GETS YOU CHAPS TO FOLLOW HIM!
THIS IS A BIT OF LUCK FOR ME! YOU CAN PROBABLY TELL ME ALL I WANT TO KNOW!
I TELL YOU ALL, SAHIB... I TELL YOU ALL! PLEASE DO NOT KILL ME!
IT IS THE CARAVAN, MASTER... THE CARAVAN OF TERROR! WHEN IT COMES, WE ALL HIDE OURSELVES, OR GHULAM WOULD HAVE US KILLED! BUT... IT IS THE CARAVAN THAT WILL RULE THE WORLD!
INT'RESTIN'! I WONDER WHAT IT CONTAINS! IS THAT ALL YOU KNOW?
YEA, VERILY, MASTER, WE KNOW NO MORE... NOR I NOR SHARIF!
WELL, I CAN'T LEAVE YOU TWO CHAPS HERE FOR THE JACKALS! I DON'T LIKE THAT SORT OF THING! I'M GOIN' TO CUT YOU FREE, AND YOU'RE GOIN' TO GIVE YOURSELVES UP TO THE FRONTIER FORCE, WHICH IS RIGHT BEHIND ME!

ALI RUNS SWIFTLY WHEN ADAM SETS HIM FREE, BUT SHARIF HAS A DIFFERENT IDEA...
YOU HAVE SAVED MY LIFE, SAHIB, AND I AM YOURS TO COMMAND! BY THE BEARD OF PROPHET, I SWEAR TO BE YOUR FAITHFUL SERVANT!
'PON MY WORD, I'M INCLINED TO TRUST THE BEARD OF THE PROPHET! I KNOW YOU FELLERS FROM THE OLD DAYS! WHEN YOU MAKE A VOW, YOU DIE BEFORE YOU BREAK IT!
LEAD ON, THEN, SHARIF, HELP ME FIND THE HOUSE OF MY OLD FRIEND, SHAH BAZ! FOR HE IS ONE WHO WILL KNOW THE TRUTH!
I'M REALLY BEGINNING TO TRUST YOU, OLD CHAP! ALREADY I SEEM TO RECOGNIZE THE COUNTRY!
WE ARE NEARLY THERE, SAHIB! THE HOUSE OF SHAH BAZ IS JUST AHEAD!
IN THE COURTYARD, WHERE THE MEN OF THE HOUSE GATHER GRIMLY, ADAM IS GUIDED UP THE STEPS TO THE LIVING QUARTERS...
THIS WAY, SAHIB!
YOU DON'T NEED TO TELL ME ... I KNOW!
IN THE HOUSES OF MY PEOPLE, SAHIB, ANYONE WHO CLAIMS SHELTER IS NEVER ILL-TREATED!
GLAD TO HEAR IT, BUT THE FAMILY OF SHAH BAZ WOULD NOT ILL-TREAT ME ANYWAY!

I DO NOT LIKE THIS, BROTHER! WHO IS THIS MAN?
WAIT, NUR! I THINK I KNOW HIM! HE IS LIKE THAT PICTURE ON THE WALL!
NOW I KNOW YOU, SAHIB, IN YOUR OWN CLOTHES! SHAH BAZ, THE FATHER OF MY FATHER OF MY FATHER!
HOW LONG AGO YOU MAKE IT SEEM! YES, I AM HE! AND I COME AS A FRIEND!
BUT ADAM'S WORDS ARE LOST IN THE CRACK OF A RIFLE, AS A BULLET COMES THROUGH ONE OF THE LOOPHOLES...
I KNEW IT! THIS IS TREACHERY! WE ARE BEING ATTACKED!
THIS MUST BE ALI'S WORK, SAHIB! HE IS NOT TO BE TRUSTED, THAT ONE!
AND I SAVED HIM FROM THE JACKALS!
YOU SEE, GHULAM GI, I TELL THE TRUTH! THEY ARE IN THAT HOUSE!
DESTROY IT! BRING UP THE GUNS! LET NONE ESCAPE! THEY SHALL NOT RUIN MY PLANS!

SHARIF, WE MUST DO SOMETHING! THESE ARE MY FRIENDS AND I HAVE BROUGHT THIS TROUBLE UPON THEM! TELL THEM TO CALL A TRUCE!
A TRUCE, YOU SAY! NAY! WE ARE NOT COWARDS! DOG THOUGH YOU ARE, YOU ARE OUR GUEST, AND WE MUST DIE TO DEFEND YOU!
YOU FOOL! YOU ARE MISTAKEN! SHOW THE WHITE FLAG!
I WILL CALL THE TRUCE! IT IS NO SHAME TO ME TO DO SO!
CEASE FIRE! WE HAVE SURRENDERED!



BUT ADAM HAS NO INTENTION OF BEING SHOT. IN THE HEEL OF HIS BOOT THERE IS A TEAR GAS BOMB, AND HE HAS ONLY TO STAMP HIS FOOT TO SET IT OFF...

HAVING EXPLODED THIS BOMB THE TWO RUN FOR THEIR LIVES...

WHAT THE DICKENS IS THIS?
THE DOVECOTE, SAHIB! WE MAKE THEM IN THE GROUND!
GOOD, SAHIB! THEY WILL NOT FIND US HERE!
BY SHAITAN! THEY HAVE VANISHED COMPLETELY! THEY MUST BE DEVILS!
BUT ADAM AND SHARIF ARE QUITE COMFORTABLE IN THE BOTTOM OF THE 'DOVECOTE'...
A WONDERFUL TRICK, SHARIF! I HAVE HEARD OF YOUR METHOD OF MAKING DOVECOTES BY DIGGING A HOLE IN THE GROUND!
IT IS OUR CUSTOM, SAHIB!
TIME TO GO, IT IS DARK! NOW TO FIND THAT CARAVAN OF GHULAM MOHAMMED... AND ITS DEADLY SECRET!

CAREFUL, HERE, MY FRIEND... I SMELL CAMELS!
IT IS THE CARAVAN, SAHIB!
WHAT THE DICKENS IS THIS? IT IS UNLIKE ANY CAMEL PACK I HAVE EVER SEEN!
IT IS BEYOND ME, SAHIB!
MACHINERY OF SOME SORT! I DO NOT KNOW OF THIS! DO YOU, SHARIF?
NAY, MASTER! I AM NOT LEARNED IN THE WAYS OF THE WEST!
THE WEST! MY GOODNESS, YOU HAVE HIT IT! THIS IS NOT THE EAST, BUT THE MECHANICAL WEST! WHAT HAVE WE DISCOVERED?

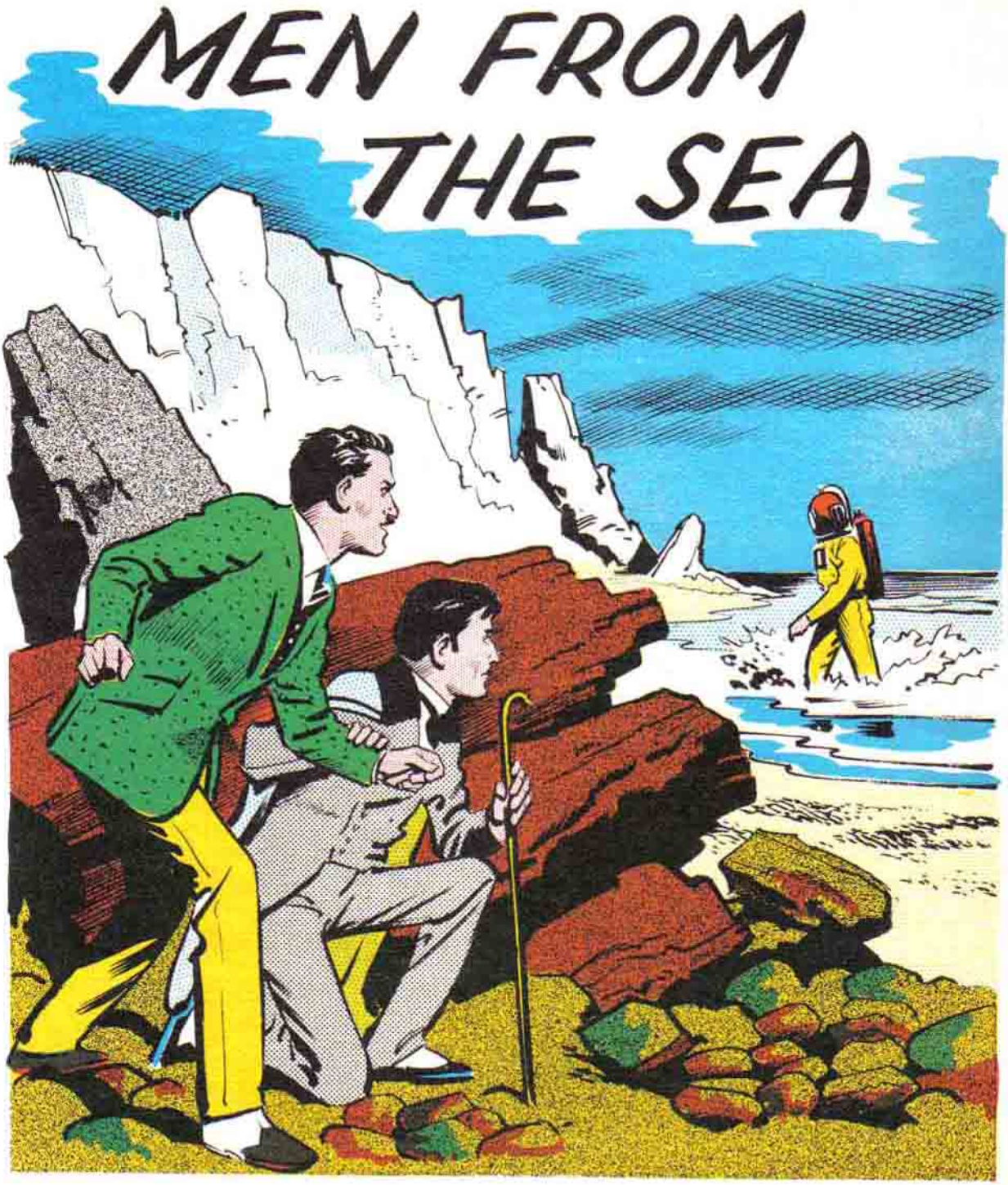
BUT IT IS NEARING DAWN. AND DAWN BRINGS ONE OF THE CAMP GUARDS...
BY ALLAH! WHO ARE YOU?
RED TEETH! A BETEL CHEWER! AND ONE OF GHULAM'S MEN!
YOU ARE UNFORTUNATE, MY FRIEND! YOU HAVE INTERRUPTED OUR INVESTIGATION!
I MUST KNOW WHAT THAT MACHINERY REALLY IS!
YES MASTER, BUT WE MUST STAY ALIVE!
DAWNLIGHT IS NOT THE BEST TIME TO BE CAUGHT, SHARIF! WE MUST HIDE AGAIN!
THERE IS A CAVE JUST AHEAD, SAHIB!
HOW RIGHT YOU ARE, SHARIF! THESE VILLAINS WOULD KILL US WITHOUT HESITATION! BUT I MUST STILL DISCOVER GHULAM'S SECRET! WE MUST FOLLOW THAT CARAVAN!

SO, AS THE CAMEL TRAIN MOVES OFF...
WE ARE FOLLOWING IT, SAHIB, BUT IT IS VERY DANGEROUS! GHULAM SHOOTS EVERYONE WHO GETS TOO NEAR!
WE CAN WATCH IT FROM HERE FOR AT LEAST A MILE! IT IS NOW ENTERING THE NARROWEST AND ROCKIEST PART OF THE PASS!
MASTER, IT IS WITCH-CRAFT!
NONSENSE, THEY ARE USING SOME KIND OF SMOKESCREEN! THEY ARE AFRAID OF AIR RECONNAISSANCE!
BY THE GREAT LORD HARRY! THERE IS A MYSTERY HERE! WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO THEM ALL?
BUT ADAM STARES IN AMAZEMENT AT THE EMPTY PASS WHEN THE MIST HAS CLEARED AWAY...
I TOLD YOU, SAHIB, IT IS WITCHCRAFT! WE SHOULD RUN FOR OUR LIVES!
WE'LL RUN ALL RIGHT, OLD CHAP, BUT ONLY TO FIND OUT WHERE THEY'VE GONE! I HAVE AN IDEA!

ADAM FOLLOWS THE TRAIL IN THE NULLAH...
AAAEEE! TIS AS I SAID... TIS WITCHCRAFT! THEY ARE BUT GHOSTS!
THIS IS THE WAY THEY WENT... AND THERE, JUST AHEAD IS THE END OF THE TRAIL!
NO GHOSTS HERE, OLD CHAP. ONLY AN ENORMOUS CAVE! THAT'S WHERE THEY WENT... AND THAT'S WHERE WE'RE GOING, TOO!
IT IS THE MOUTH OF HELL, MASTER, BUT I WILL FOLLOW THEE!
CAREFUL, SHARIF, WE ARE NEARING THE SPOT!
SO THAT'S WHAT IT IS... A ROCKET LAUNCHING PAD! AND CUNNINGLY HIDDEN IN THIS EXTINCT VOLCANO! THIS IS WHERE THE CARAVAN VANISHED WITH THOSE PIECES OF ROCKET! AND NOW THEY ARE BEING ASSEMBLED!
SO THIS IS WHAT THE FRONTIER FORCE WAS LOOKING FOR! WE HAVE FOUND IT, SHARIF, AND IT IS OUR DUTY TO DESTROY IT!

SO BE IT! SHER DIL, THE LION-HEART, DIED FOR THIS! WHY SHOULD I LIVE FOR EVER? I DIE WITH HIM, KNOWING I HAVE DONE MY DUTY! THIS BOMB WILL MAKE A BLAST THAT WILL BE HEARD ALL OVER THE WORLD!
BUT THE MOUNTAIN ITSELF EXPLODES...
BY A MIRACLE, ADAM AND SHARIF SURVIVE THE EXPLOSION OF THE ROCKET...
YOU MUST BE A WIZARD, MASTER! WE SHOULD HAVE DIED WITH GHULAM AND HIS HORDE!
I AM NO WIZARD, SHARIF, BUT ALLAH PROTECTS THE JUST!
MISSION COMPLETED, SIR, GHULAM MOHAMMED DESTROYED! I REGRET THAT YOUR AGENT, SHER DIL, IS DEAD!
ALLAH BE PRAISED! MISTER ADAMANT, WE ARE GRATEFUL THAT YOU ARE STILL WITH US...

MEN FROM THE SEA



It was a complete mystery. Lights seemed to be flashing under the calm sea off the Cornish village of Polarrow. Adam sat in the stern of a rowboat that had crept out from the jetty with muffled oars, rowed by Squire Grainger who had called him in to investigate the matter.

"It cannot be phosphorescence," Adam said

quietly, "because there is no such thing so close to the shore."

"But you must agree that it is light under the water," the Squire replied. "That is the thing that has been puzzling me for days."

Adam's lean, hatchet features were set in a mould of concentration. He was staring at the surface over the gun'l of the rowboat. Every now and then, the surface seemed to be lighted as though by some diffused electric bulb below.

"You are quite right, Grainger. There is some mystery here. How would it be if we followed these lights to the beach?"

Grainger was surprised. Although he had watched this weird light from under water from the cliffs, it had not occurred to him to follow it into the beach.

"As you say, Adam," he responded, and he bent to the muffled oars.

The oars were muffled because the Squire did not wish to attract attention. He had already complained to the police, but the police of Polarrow had regarded the matter as nonsense. The Squire must be seeing things, they said; there could not be light under the water; there weren't even any smugglers these days.

Squire Grainger was not so sure. As the son of one of Adam's old friends he had written to Adam asking him to pay a visit, and Adam had been delighted to do so. It would make a holiday, anyway. But this was turning out to be a strange sort of holiday.

It had been at Adam's suggestion that they had hired the rowboat. It was the Squire's idea to muffle the oars. The night was dark, but the sea was calm. In absolute silence the Squire rowed the small boat in to the beach.

This was a strip of shingle lying under high black cliffs, at the foot of which it was almost impossible to see a thing. But Adam helped Grainger to pull the rowboat up on to the shingle, and the pair then turned and stared at the strange, flickering glow on the surface of the calm sea.

"It's coming closer," Adam said suddenly. "We might do well to get ourselves under cover."

In the darkness they crouched behind an outcrop of the black rock. Adam, in cloak and with swordstick, was ready for anything. Already he was feeling that tingle that came to him where there was danger.

Suddenly, the water swirled and a strange, globular object appeared. At first sight it seemed like some monster from the deep. Then, gradually, in the faint light of the stars, it showed itself for what it was.

It was the round helmet and face plate of a diver!

Adam grabbed his companion's arm as the Squire started.

"Quiet!" he whispered, "Our job is simply to watch."

The helmet was followed by the burly shoulders of the diver in his suit of rubber, and, as he walked out of the sea on to the beach, he switched off the torch he had been carrying. This was one of those rubber-encased torches that will work under water.

"You see now where those lights came from!" Adam whispered.

The diver seemed glad to get out of the sea. He was wearing a self-contained suit with an aqualung on his back, but it was the normal suit of a walking diver . . . not skin diving outfit here. He also seemed to grunt as he started removing the lead weights from his chest and back.

Very soon he had unscrewed the plate glass in the round aperture in the front of his helmet, and he clumped on up the beach and disappeared into the black mouth of a cave.

Once again the Squire made a movement to follow him, but the pressure of Adam's fingers on his arm kept him quiet. This was just as well because the first diver was followed by another . . . and another . . . and then another!

They came tramping out of the water like men from the sea. There were four altogether, and each one was glad to relieve himself of the lead weights that were strapped to him, back and front. The weights dropped with a dull thud on to the shingle as they walked on and followed the first diver into the cave.

Adam waited for some considerable time. Then, gripping the Squire's arm for the third time, he led Grainger for some distance.

"They should be coming back," he whispered. "I want to see if I am right."

Sure enough, the divers presently returned. One by one they emerged from the dark mouth of the cave and crunched their heavy way down to the sea. The shingle scattered under their leaden boots, and they disappeared slowly

beneath the water as they walked seawards.

When the last one had gone, Squire Grainger took a deep breath.

"What the dickens does it mean?" he gasped.

"Did you see what I saw?" Adam responded. "Did you notice anything strange?"

"The whole business is so strange I don't know what you're talking about."

"Ah, then you were not really observant. But you must have seen that those divers removed their leaden weights as they came ashore?"

"I did that, certainly."

"Yet when they came back and walked into the water, they did not put them on again?"

If the light had been better, Adam might have seen a glazed look in the Squire's eyes.

"So what does that mean?"

"It means," said Adam, "one of two things. Either that their walk back was impossible, or that they had put on other weights inside that cave. You know," he went on, " that the human body is too light to sink? That is why the conventional diver always wears lead weights. Yet these fellows, after casting their weights as they came out, walked back efficiently into the sea with their electric torches flashing under water. That, of course," Adam concluded, "is the reason for the flashing lights."

Squire Grainger gazed admiringly at his companion in the darkness.

"Good for you, Adam. You spotted more than I did. Now . . . tell me what it all means?"

* * *

Adam was not yet prepared to explain the whole mystery. Indeed, he did not know it all himself. But the things he had noticed had set him thinking.

"We have our own torches, Grainger," he said. "I think we should make an investigation of that cave."

As quietly as possible they made their way up the shelving beach to the mouth of the cave. This was so dark that it was only like a patch of blacker blackness in the darkness of the moonless night. But Adam, shielding the light of his torch with his fingers, shone it cautiously inside.

At first sight the cave seemed empty. Then, as they progressed, they noticed a number of crates. These were wooden boxes of small size stored on top of each other.

"Strange!" said Adam. "We did not see those divers carrying anything ashore."

"You depress me, Adam," growled Grainger. "I was beginning to think we had surprised a nest of smugglers."

"Maybe we have at that . . . only they are very peculiar smugglers."

They went on into the cave. It wound and twisted, until presently Adam felt it was safe to show the full beam of his torch.

A startling sight met their eyes. The cave seemed to be full of crates and diving gear. There were helmets and spare rubber suits, boots, chest and back plates and aqualungs. Adam paused and swivelled the torch around him.

"Quite a salvage outfit," he said. "Have you had any wrecks hereabouts lately, Grainger?"

"Not a thing. Thank goodness, we have been free of wrecks for many years. I know we Cornish people are supposed to be wreckers, but we are not so any longer."

"Then we had better examine this gear," said Adam.

Both Adam and the Squire nosed all round the crates and diving apparatus. For a long time the mystery deepened. What were these strange divers doing under the sea? The mysterious lights were now explained, for they came from the diffused light of the divers' torches under water. But why were the divers there at all?

Adam picked up the helmets and the boots, examining them closely. He also picked up one of the chest weights, and here he stumbled with an exclamation.

"What have you found?" cried the Squire.

"Heaven knows!" exclaimed Adam. "The weight of this thing almost dragged me down."

For a few moments Adam was bewildered. Then, turning to the Squire, he made a strange request.

"Grainger, bring in one of those weights we saw those divers casting on to the beach."

Without a word Grainger turned and went out of the cave. When he returned, he was groaning under the weight of a lead chest weight.

"Those fellows must be pretty tough," he said. "This almost drags *me* down."

Adam took the weight and tried it. Then, for comparison, he picked up the other weight and handed it to the Squire.

"Try this, old chap."

The Squire almost collapsed.

"My goodness, Adam, this seems twice as heavy."

"Yes . . . and yet it is only the same size. Compare it carefully with the one you brought in. The same size . . . yet vastly heavier."

Squire Grainger lifted each weight and nodded.

"You're right, Adam. The weights in here are nearly twice as heavy as those the divers jettisoned on the beach. But how is that? They are both lead, surely."

"No, sir!" Adam's tone was grim. "Both are painted grey, but only those on the beach are lead. These others . . . can you not guess what they really are? They are gold . . . solid gold . . . although still painted grey."

The enormity of the thought stunned the Squire for a moment. Then . . .

"So these people really are smugglers!" he gasped. "Only they are smugglers in the modern fashion. They are not smuggling anything into the country. They are smuggling gold out of it!"

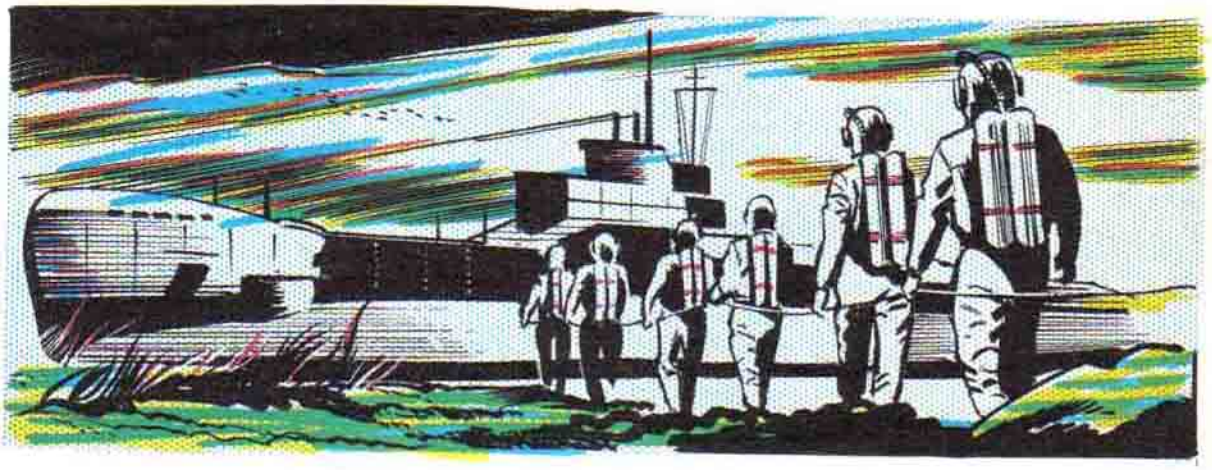
* * *

The silence was broken by a grim voice behind them.

"I'm afraid you are right, gentlemen. Only do not turn round. Please raise your hands instead. We do not like intruders here . . . especially intruders who have discovered our secret."

Adam and the Squire both froze where they stood. Then, raising their hands above their heads, they turned to behold a strange figure. He was a man of middle age wearing thigh seaboots, and he held both a torch and a gun. The gun was pointed directly at them. Also, he wore a beard and a stocking cap in the fashion of some old-time pirate.

"Thank you, gentlemen," he said as they turned with raised hands. "You have saved me the unpleasant task of killing you. I came down in time to hear what you were saying, and that



means you must be my prisoners."

"Who are you?" gasped the Squire.

The gunman smiled.

"You can call me Drake," he said. "Or Hawkins . . . whichever you prefer. I am the modern counterpart. I see no harm in smuggling, particularly when there is over ten million in it."

"You are taking gold out of this country when this country is in great difficulties," said Adam grimly.

"I am indeed," smiled the gunman. "And you are going to help me. You have found out too much, gentlemen. What a pity it is when we know too much!" His tone was sneering. "When my divers return, you are going to join them. They need help to carry all this weight. You will help them to do so, and then, I fear, on our voyage to South America, you will unfortunately be lost overboard. Don't move!" he added with a snarl, as the Squire looked ready to leap at him. "It will not help you. Just keep quiet until the others return."

* * *

For nearly an hour Adam and Squire Grainger had done as the gunman told them. They had kept quiet. Now, a grim circle of men was around them, and they were being forced into diving suits and helmets.

Adam's cloak and swordstick had been removed. In his shirtsleeves, he was pushed into the rubber suit. Presently, the globular diving helmet was placed over his head and screwed down to the brass neckpiece. It was the same with Grainger. The Squire stared gloomily at Adam through the round apperture in the helmet. Before the glasses were fastened in position, Adam found time to speak to him.

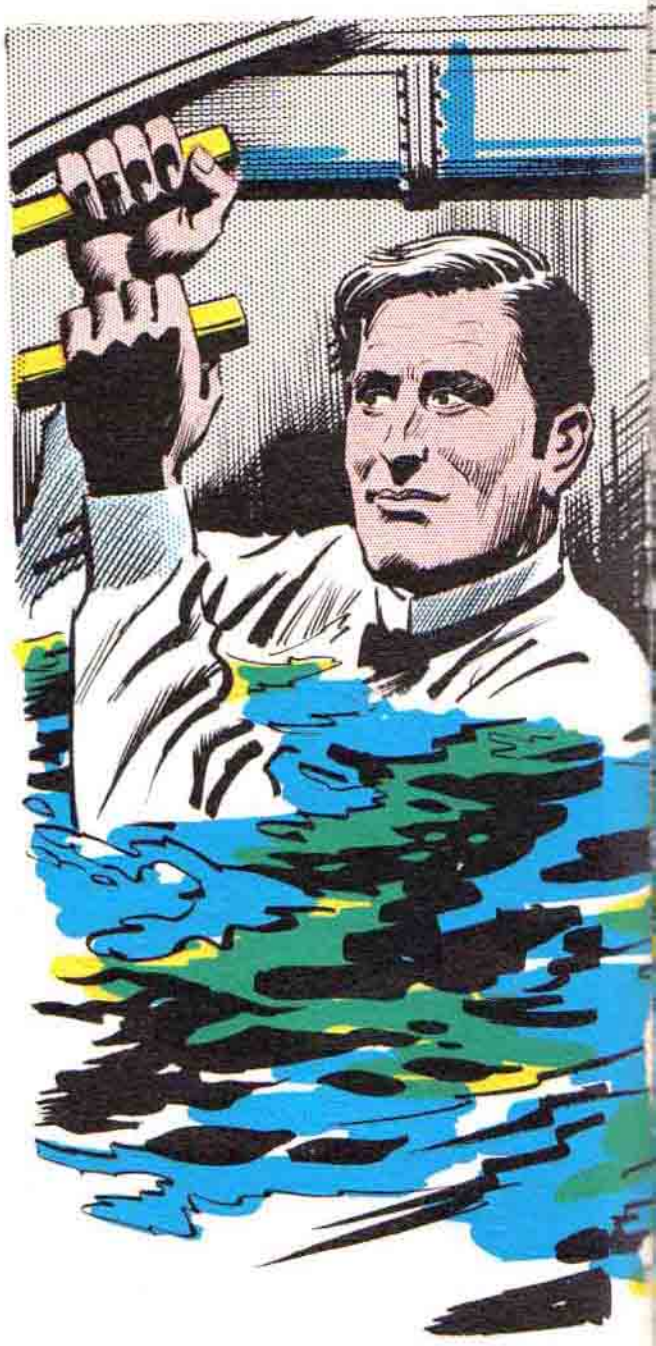
"Cheer up, Grainger," he said. "Life is full of strange experiences."

The Squire's reply was blotted out by the plate glass that was fixed in front of his face.

Solemnly the squad of divers, including Adam and Grainger, set out on their return journey. Adam was interested in finding out where they actually went under the sea. And he was not surprised to find that they followed a cable which had been laid from the cave right under water.

But what was at the other end of it!

Adam soon knew. Although their pace underwater was slow, in less than another hour



they had come to the hull of a mysterious vessel underwater. Adam judged it to be some wartime submarine, although it had been greatly altered. As the divers' lights flashed over it, Adam saw that it had been fitted with a modern airlock in the side. Connecting the outer and pressure hulls there was a short passage, and one by one the divers entered this passage until a door closed behind them. Then there was a wait while the water in the airlock was drained out. Presently it was Adam's turn, and Adam noted carefully exactly how the airlock worked.

Needless to say, both he and Grainger had been covered by the diver in charge as they walked on the seabed from the shore. No pistol was used this time, but a simple skin-diver's harpoon gun. This covered them both, and was a lethal weapon.

As Adam entered the sub, a diver immediately began to remove his diving gear. In a few moments Adam was in his shirtsleeves and bound securely in the engine-room. The diver sneered as he handed Adam a sopping wet cloak.

"Your swordstick is inside it, guv'nor," he said. "They might have been used in evidence if we'd left them ashore."

"Thank you very much," said Adam politely.

Grainger was not so lucky. His jacket had been left in the cave, and he sat and shivered in his shirt-sleeves.

"I always thought these submarines were warm inside," he growled.

"So they are when they have a big crew," Adam responded. "At least, that is what I have read. But this is a very old one, probably not much after my own time, and my guess is that it was bought originally by some foreign government and then acquired by these crooks."

"I don't care where it came from," growled Grainger. "What I want to know is where it's taking us?"

"Ah, that is the question." Adam was still cheerful. "As I said before, there are very few men here, only one boat-keeper besides those divers, and that makes me very thoughtful."

"G-g-g-glad to hear it," said Grainger, his teeth chattering with the cold. "But, since they've taken our diving suits off, how the dickens are we going to escape underwater?"

Adam did not reply. But already a scheme was forming in his mind. No doubt his captors thought the prisoners were safe without diving suits in a submarine lying on the seabed, but, if they did, they had under-estimated Adam.

As Adam had pointed out, there was only one boat-keeper when the divers had passed once again through the air-lock on their

journey back to the cave. This man came and examined the captives' bonds, then went off to some cabin where he was reading a book.

"I wonder how long this has been going on?" Adam said.

"Long enough to get a load of gold worth a government ransom," growled Grainger. "It was at least a week ago when I first noticed those lights under the water." He seemed suddenly to regret his ill-humour. "I'm sorry, Adam, I got you into this, and yet I've been acting as though it was your fault."

"So it is," said Adam, still cheerful. "I suggested that we should examine that cave. And I would now like you to turn your back on me and examine my right-hand waistcoat pocket."

Grainger looked blank. Then, realising that, because their hands had been bound behind them Adam wanted him to find something, he eventually drew out a small pocket knife from Adam's waistcoat pocket.

"Open it and hold out the blade," said Adam.

In a few moments Adam had sawn through the ropes on his wrists by means of the blade that Grainger held behind him, after which it was a simple matter for him to free them both.

"I wouldn't have thought of that," said the Squire admiringly.

"Neither did those crooks," smiled Adam. "They thought we were safe when they had put my swordstick well out of reach. But the schoolboys of my time were never without a pocket knife, no matter how small."

His next move surprised Grainger still more, for Adam, instead of making any effort to escape, went carefully over the machinery in the engine-room. Presently he uttered a cry of pleasure and moved a switch, wrenching it back and forth until he had pulled the handle off completely. Immediately a faint glow appeared in the batteries that drove the underwater electric motors.

"Short circuit," said Adam briefly, as he poked at a loose wire. "If that fellow doesn't notice it soon, this sub will be completely out of action."

"But—but what about us?"

"It is time we weren't here," said Adam cheerfully.

Like one in a dream the Squire followed Adam and did as Adam told him. First, they went into the air-lock, although still without diving suits. Here Adam moved a lever that allowed water to enter from the outside.

"Even in my time they were considering air-locks of this nature," he said, as sea-water gurgled around their feet. "I saw by the depth gauge that the sea here is very shallow. So, if we take a deep breath when the pressure inside equals that outside, we should be able to shoot to the surface before we drown."

He was as calm as a lecturer in college!

Things worked out as he had foretold. Presently, when the sea was reaching their necks, he told Grainger that the moment had come. Each took a deep breath, then Adam moved the levers that opened the outer door.

Grainger found himself in a swirl of air and water as the air escaped. Struggling gamely, he reached the surface with a feeling of thankfulness. Adam was beside him, and Adam was quite cheerful as he pointed to the shore.

"Only a few hundred yards," he said. "We ought to make it easily. I'm glad I remembered my cloak and swordstick. Although," he added thoughtfully, "I would prefer dry clothing."

* * *

In the calm sea they reached the jetty after a swim of only twenty minutes. As soon as they had done so, and climbed the weed-grown steps, Adam turned and gazed seawards.

"That sub is about a mile due south of this spot," he said. "For safety's sake, I think you should inform the harbour patrol. It is very late, but there should be somebody on duty."

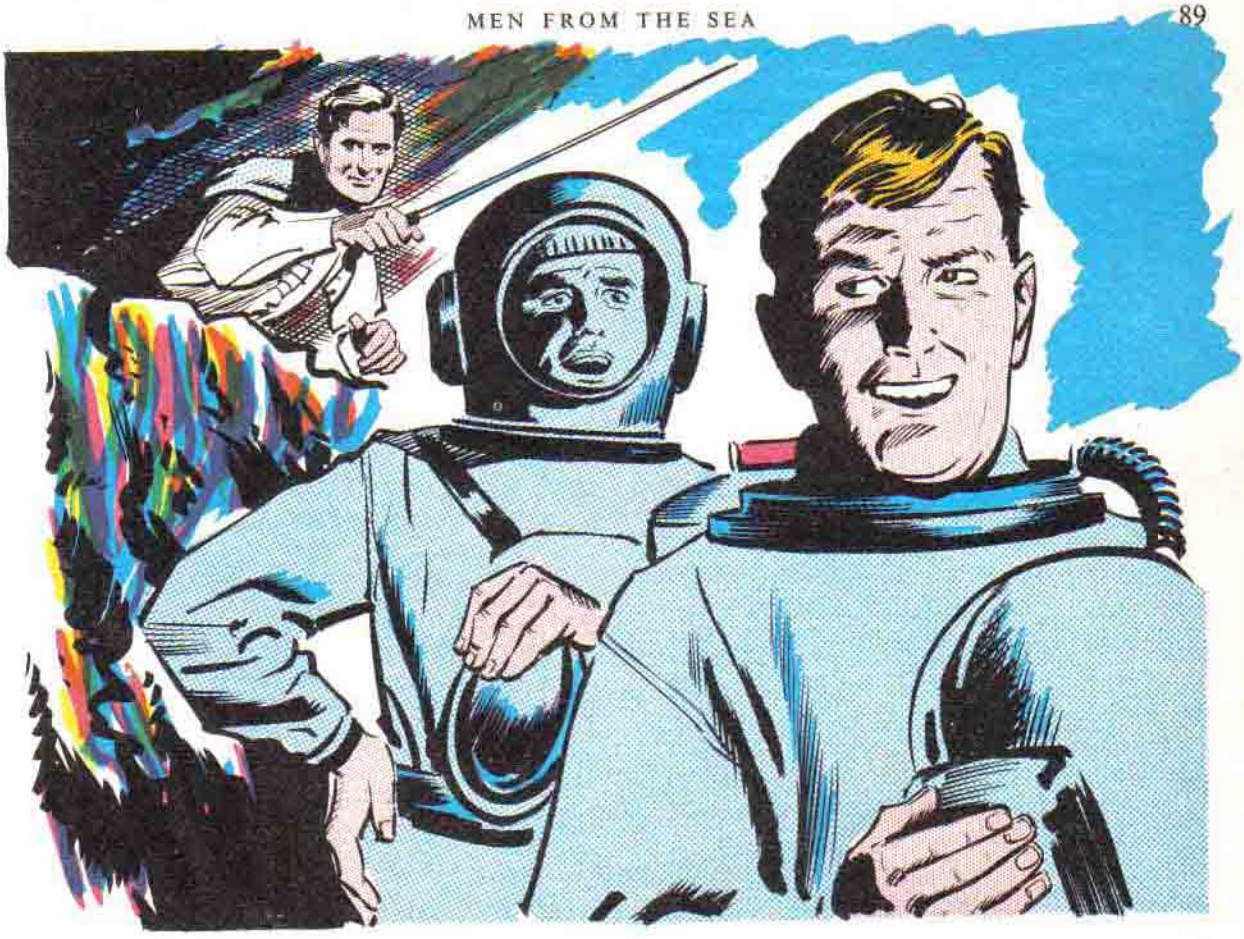
"But what about you?"

"I must get back to the cave. I counted a number of gold weights there still to be removed, and those divers will be back for them before long . . . even if that boat-keeper has succeeded in finding that short-circuit I left him."

"Adam, I'll come with you. You are not going back into danger alone."

"Please do as I say. At all costs the presence of that sub must be reported."

Grainger saw the point, and he hurried off.



Adam, throwing his wet cloak over his shoulders, went casually along the jetty and made his way to the beach.

As he had expected, the cave was empty at that moment. The divers had been and gone again, and their leader, who called himself Drake or Hawkins, was nowhere to be seen. Adam still had his torch, and he shielded it carefully as he looked around.

Then he settled down to wait.

* * *

The wait was not a long one. Suddenly, Adam heard the crunch of heavy boots on the shingle. He crouched lower behind the shelf of rock that hid him in the darkness of the cave.

The first diver entered, and was unaware of anything unusual. Shining his torch ahead of him, he made straight for the last of the gold weights.

But Adam had made a slight movement with his unsheathed swordstick . . . and crouched again as he waited for the next diver. As each one entered, Adam made the same swift movement in the darkness, and it was only on the last occasion that he misjudged the distance slightly.

"Coo!" gasped one of the divers, who had removed his face-plate for a breath of fresh air. "Something's stung me."

"Must be one o' them underwater bees," said another, amid a general laugh, and the diver who thought he had been stung forgot about it.

In truth his rubber suit had been punctured by the point of Adam's swordstick, as had the suits of the others. But Adam had been careful

to make the puncture a slight one, so that none of them should be aware of it until they went back under the water. In the last one he had thrust a little too hard, but he breathed freely when he found that the diver who had felt the sting was taking no more notice of it.

Adam was still hidden when Hawkins suddenly appeared with his torch.

"Right, men," he said. "That's the last of the cargo. I'll be following you on the surface. Don't forget I've got a listening apparatus to check your direction. Were the prisoners safe when you left them?"

"Safe in the engine-room," said one of the men.

"Good. Off you go then. I'll give you a good hour for that slow walk underwater, then I'll be out on the surface in the Sea Queen."

Adam listened intently. So the boss of this gang was making sure of his own getaway in a fast surface craft. Adam remembered seeing the Sea Queen, a speed-boat capable of at least thirty knots, in Polarrow harbour when he had arrived. Although Adam had done his best to hold up the submarine and the divers, he realised that there was still another task ahead of him.

* * *

Adam crept silently from the mouth of the cave while the divers and Hawkins were still discussing the last of their arrangements. Once off the beach, he ran swiftly past the jetty and round to the main harbour. Sure enough, the Sea Queen had been brought in close alongside the western arm of the harbour, and was rocking gently in a rising swell. On deck, a man paced up and down continually looking at his watch.

This was obviously another of Hawkins' men, probably the engineer, for Hawkins seemed to have sealore enough to act as skipper.

"This must be stopped," Adam said to himself. "But how?"

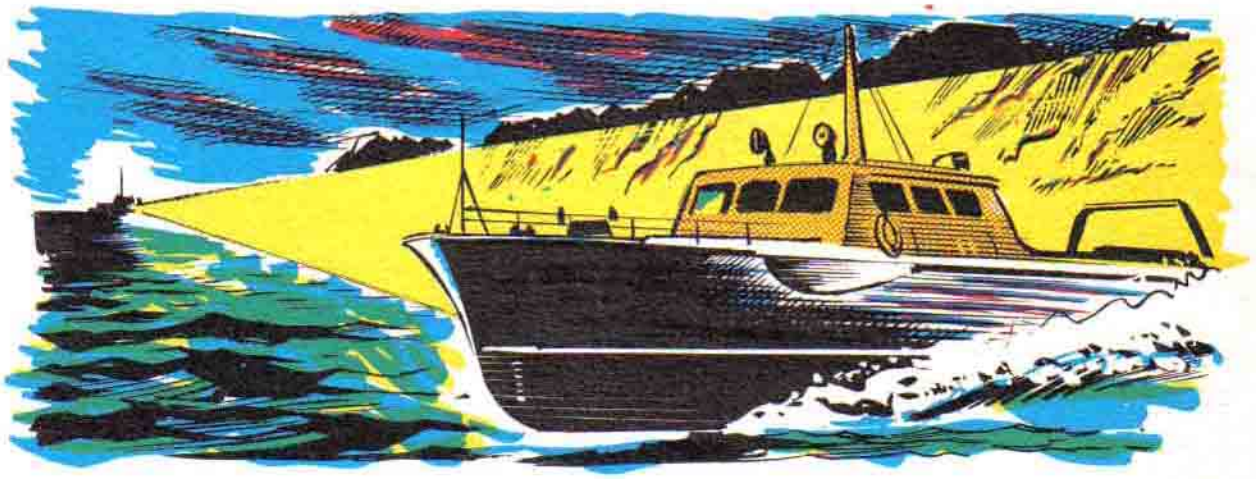
Once again Adam used his wits. Waiting till the man on guard had walked forward, Adam slipped quietly on board and crouched on the stern deck. In a few moments he found what he wanted, which was an ordinary heaving line, coiled and hung neatly from a peg on the after

part of the wheelhouse. With this in hand, Adam slipped further aft to the taffrail, where he fastened one end of the line to a stanchion right down near the deck and dropped the other end overboard. In the darkness, it would never be noticed.

He had just finished when there was a hoarse shout from the wharf. In his thigh-length seaboots and stocking cap, Hawkins was yelling furiously.

"Jake! Where the dickens are you? Whose that on the stern deck?"

Jake came running aft from forward, and Adam prepared himself for battle. One stroke of his swordstick . . . used purely as a stick, stunned Jake as the latter came round the wheelhouse. But Hawkins himself had sprung aboard, and was coming for Adam with a weapon strangely like Adam's own, a rapier of the type carried by the early privateers on which Hawkins seemed to have modelled himself.



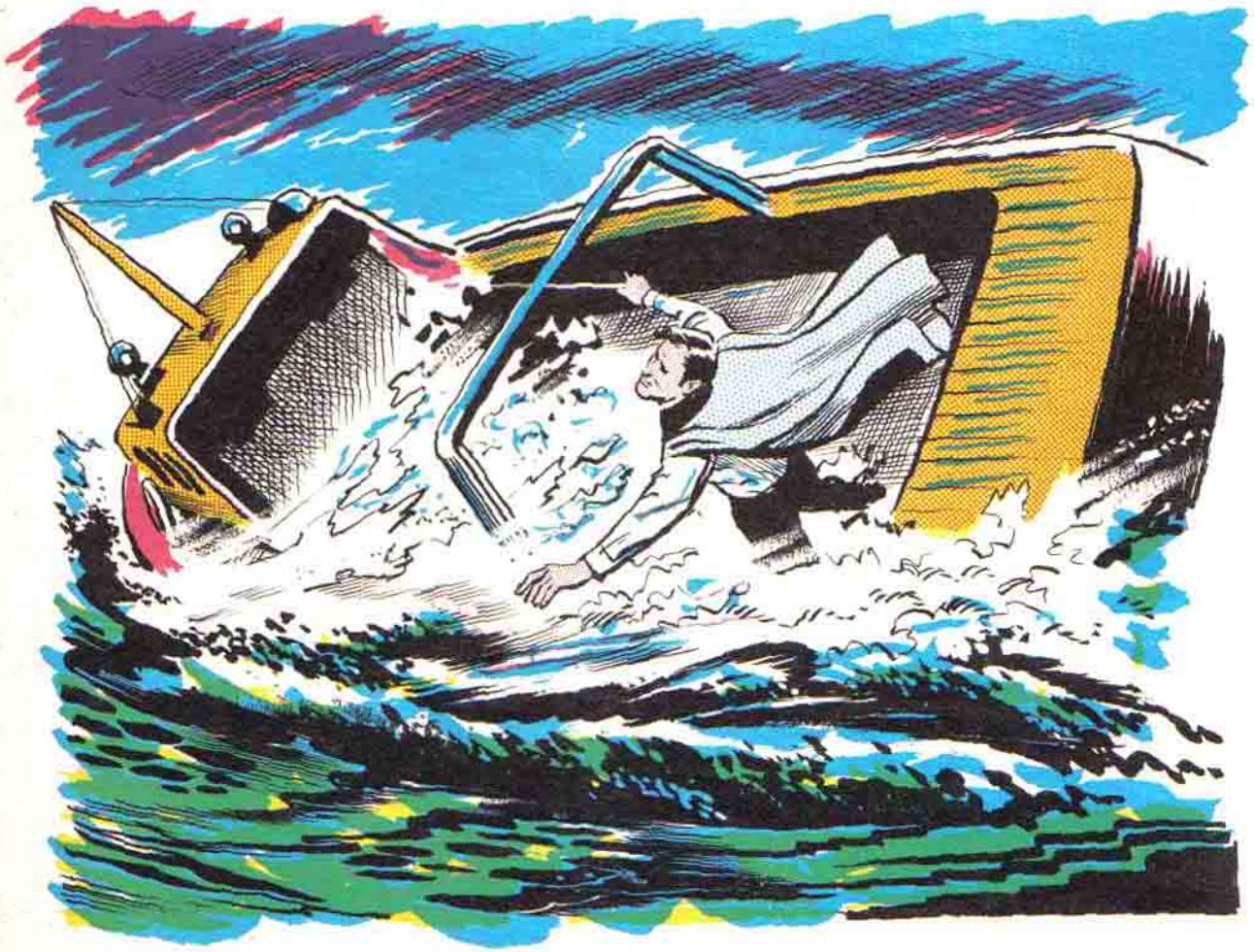
He was a good swordsman, too. As Adam fenced with him, he realised he had met his match. The outcome was not at all certain. Hawkins fought with fury, and the pair waltzed around the stern-deck until Adam was driven right back to the taffrail.

"I don't know how you got here," Hawkins snarled, "but this is the end for you. Die, you interfering . . . AAAAGH!"

He broke off with a gasp. At the last moment, using a trick he had learned at the fencing school, Adam flicked Hawkins' weapon from his hand. For a split second Hawkins stared at him, seeming dazed, then turned and raced for the wheelhouse. The door was slammed and bolted in Adam's face.

Next moment there was a roar from the twin, lightweight engines. Propellors threshed the water into foam astern, and their power was such that the mooring ropes snapped and the high-speed craft surged out across the harbour. At the same moment, a searchlight flashed on from a craft coming from the other side, and Adam realised that it was the harbour patrol alerted by the Squire.

But the patrol boat was only a slow one. It could not possibly overtake Hawkins' craft. Adam raced to the stern and saw that his plan with the heaving line had failed. In normal circumstances, with a slow start, the line would have wrapped itself round a propellor and made the boat unmanageable, but now it was



simply trailing astern like a tow-rope.

Adam gazed swiftly around in the growing light. There was a pile of gear on deck, and he saw what he wanted. It was more diving gear, and among it were some of the lead weights previously discarded by the divers. Drawing in the heaving line, Adam quickly hooked one of the weights to it and hurled it over the side. With the speed at which they were travelling, the weight was swept immediately round the stern and one of the engines coughed to a stop as the line wound itself round a propellor. The speedboat swerved at once into an unusually sharp turn.

Adam found himself sliding across the deck. He had succeeded beyond his expectations. At that speed, the sudden turn was capsizing the craft completely. It heeled right over and, once again that night, Adam found himself swimming fully clothed.

* * *

It was midday before the harbour patrol had sorted out the mess. Jake, the stunned boat-keeper, had revived sufficiently as the cold water struck him to keep swimming until he was picked up and placed under arrest. The divers were also seized as, finding their suits filling with water, they struggled back with their heavy weights to the beach. In addition, the stranded sub was located by a naval salvage vessel that was quickly on the spot, and its load of bullion put under guard until it could be raised.

But Hawkins himself had paid the ultimate penalty. Locked in the wheelhouse, he had been trapped when the Sea Queen capsized, and heads were shaken over him in Polarrow as the case was later discussed.

"He thought he was a real Drake or Hawkins," said the fishermen. "But they were Devon lads, not like us at all."

"A foreigner, he was," said the others solemnly.

"But what I can't understand," the Squire said to Adam, "is why he didn't use his gun when you flicked his sword away."

"That is simple," Adam replied. "He had packed it away in his kit bag for the voyage. That sword he carried was a piece of bravado. It was an heirloom left him by one of his ancestors . . . a lucky one, he thought . . . a sign that he was a modern buccaneer. Like all crooks, he was a bit mad . . . only very, very dangerous. . . ."

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